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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The First Sunday After The Epiphany January 7, 1968

"THE WITNESS OF WORDS" (Exodus 20:7)
(Sermon II: The Ten Commandments)

You've heard it said many times that most of us live our days just one day at a time. Whatever else that may mean, perhaps it could mean that we're not about to look too far back into the past, and also we're not about to peer at too great distance into the future, that whatever else may happen, let me take one day as it comes, ignoring the past, not worrying about the future.

If this should be an observation that applies to most of us, then a very healthy and salutary thing would be that we might sit down and read a page or two of history, for the purpose of history is that we might learn, that is, that we might chart the course for the future, on the basis of the experience of the past.

May I suggest then that immediately we give undivided attention to a great historian of our day, Arnold Toynbee, who has observed that of all the civilizations that have come and gone since the dawn of mankind - -

(and he numbers 21 of them; 14 have disappeared, and
practically without a trace behind them)

...that today, after everything that has occurred since the dawn of mankind, only 7 civilizations have left their mark.

Now, if you're the kind of a person who has the Bible in his hand, you would do well to ask this question: why should this be so? And maybe if you don't have the Bible in your hand, you might be inclined to believe that

these civilizations have run their course, because people by and large have allowed themselves to believe in the self-sufficiency of man. Now that is simply to say, they've ordered the days of their years without any reference to God.

Now for those of us who belong to the tradition of the Bible, this Judaic-Christian tradition, we can't possibly look upon life or civilization without reading it, to some degree, through the eyes of God. We begin by saying that God created the world, and as we go from page to page through the Good Book we recognize the fact that God continues to have an interest in His world, that He's never relinquished a claim to His world....and that from the very beginning, having made the world, He understood full well how it ought to operate. And so from time to time as He reveals Himself, He keeps making known to us what we ought to do, and what we ought not to do.

This is clearly established at that particular moment in the history of the Children of Israel, when, as they journey out of Egypt toward the Promised Land, God says STOP - - they are stayed in their steps, they are not to proceed any farther....until it's made perfectly plain to them that the God who made the world is to be recognized also as the Law-giver --- that He knows best how this world is to operate.

Ever since that moment, when God revealed Himself so fully as the Law-giver, we've had people who have been prone to forget, and who have endeavored to live out the days of their years either by disobeying God or by treating Him with indifference. As we began this series on the Ten Commandments last Sunday it was said that this is the day, in our generation, which might give us the ray of hope, not so much by looking to the future,

necessary as that may be, but by looking to the past. And surely it was a great moment in history when a prophet named Jeremiah said to a people as they marked a critical time in their history: "Look to the old paths; walk in the old ways, and you will find peace."

The one thing that seems to be characteristic of our day is its permissiveness. It stems from the fact that we've forgotten that that word obedience rightly belongs in the vocabulary of any people. A nation is little different than a family, and the first and fundamental thing that needs to be taught a child is obedience - - "This you do" - - "This you don't do" .....and parents fail their children when they no longer exercise the right and the role to exact a measure of obedience. Anyone who has reached the age of forty is impressed with the fact that today, from almost every corner of the globe, there are those who reject authority -- protest what is being offered by those who are in positions (shall I use the word advisedly?) to proclaim the law.

As part of the prefatory statements dealing with this sermon today, I invite your attention to the fact that a 20-year old journalist speaks to our condition. Anyone who knows London at all knows that Fleet Street and journalism are synonymous. And Dewey Morgan, a distinguished British writer, quite recently invited the journalists from Fleet Street to prepare a series of articles which indicated their attitude toward faith in God, and their recognition of moral principles in this world. Fifteen were invited to contribute. One who has read what was written says that the most significant contribution was made by a young woman, barely out of her teens, by the name of Lauren Wade, just twenty years of age.

Her significant contribution was made not only because of her youth, but what made her contribution notable is the fact that she makes the strongest protest against the loosening of moral standards, and the strongest plea for wise rules and regulations, and a strongest appeal to the Church to stand its ground and not to compromise, and not to retreat.

Some of us who try to put our finger on the spiritual pulsebeat of the Church today lament the fact that it seems as though the Church is always trying to compromise with the world, trying to meet the world halfway. If the world doesn't come up to the standards that we feel must be proclaimed in Christ's name, then we either wink, or we adjust ourselves to the world. This is reflected in many ways. A recent artist, a cartoonist, has done a very clever thing when he has a couple of boys in the barracks making some reference about the padre who had just been with them, and as the chaplain leaves, the one soldier says to the other, "If it's anything that I can't stand, it's this 'unholier than thou' attitude."

Says Miss Wade in her article, and we can well afford to give her heed:

"Divorce is on the increase;	and therefore the Church says: make marriage more flexible;
immorality is common;	therefore the church says: pre-marital intercourse is not necessarily wrong;
the illegitimacy rate is on the increase;	therefore let us have abortion;
murder is on the increase;	therefore let us abolish the death sentence . . . "

This is how Miss Wade sees the present situation.

Now with what I've shared with you so far you may not always nor fully agree, yet I ask you, as you listen to what I'm about to add, dare you honestly

ignore the analogy that she makes so well when she says:

> "If everyone is fouling like mad in a game of soccer, the football association does not automatically change the rules so that those who are doing so can continue to play a dirty game within the law. Even if everyone except one player is fouling, they would still base their rule judging on how they think the game should be played and not on how it is to be played."

You do not judge the rules simply because many people are breaking them. This is why, with all the ardor of my soul, God willing, I plan to come back to this pulpit Sunday after Sunday to share with you this study that deals with the Ten Commandments. It could be the thing most needful for our generation.

A wit has observed that it took God one night to get Israel out of Egypt; it took Him forty years to get Egypt out of Israel! Forty years - - that's a whole generation in those days! It may take us a whole generation to get things re-established and to see things from God's point of view. And that precisely is what God is trying to do when He gives the Ten Commandments, to see things from God's point of view.

Today it's the Second Commandment: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." In these most delightful sessions that we have in the catechetical class, the eighth graders, we're dealing right now with the study of the Ten Commandments. Tuesday of this past week the question was put to the class: Which of the Ten do you think is the most important? As you might imagine, there was a variety of reaction. But by the time the conversation was ended, there were those who maintained, almost with unanimity, that the First Commandment is the most important because this is the keystone. If you can't keep the First one, you can't keep the others. You begin

with the recognition of God, and allow Him the priority that becomes Him.

I didn't press as to what might have been the second most important, but knowing human nature as I do, I'm inclined to think that what God classified as the Second Commandment is not generally. given such rating, that this whole business of keeping God's name holy and not taking it in vain, if people observe the Ten Commandments at all, it comes pretty far down near the bottom of the list.

This is a lamentable thing. I'm inclined to believe that God put it exactly where He did because He wanted it to be exactly where it is....

> ...and quite parenthetically, whenever you think of the Ten Commandments, don't fail to recognize the fact that it's something given to us, not by a group of statesmen, not by a group of economists, not even by a group of church leaders in council assembled.....the bold and daring thing that we must do is to recognize at the very beginning that you simply say "God spoke" - - and if you can't begin at that point, you're in for all kinds of problems.....

Some day we'll wake up to the fact that we can't quite improve on that. In the meantime we do a lot of damage. But if you've been reared and trained in the tradition that you begin with the fact of God, you've already taken a giant step forward. "I am the Lord thy God. Thou shalt have no other gods before me"....and the Second Commandment: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."

What a man says, and what a man does, are both important. Now there's

no denying the fact that you can't always judge a man by what he says, since even from the lips of bad men can come sounds like angels whispering. But for the committed Christian, what a man says as well as what he does reflects his true character.

Now let's ask ourselves the question: What is a name? What is a name? I don't know how you might answer. I know how I might answer. From my reading and from my study I know how the Hebrews answered. From the very beginning, as far as the Hebrews were concerned, a name indicated character. It was either what a man is, or what he was intended to become. It was something very, very distinctive.

I have read with much profit what Dr. Edgar Carlsson, the very able President of Gustavus Adolphus College, has done in a series of very simple chapel addresses that he delivered to his student body on the general theme of the classic Christian faith. He touches upon this Commandment. I have read with a great deal of profit what he has written. I would like some day to meet him.

I can imagine him standing in chapel, before this assembled group of students, trying to hold their interest on this very important Commandment, one so easily broken. And he said to them something like this - - I think I remember his sentence exactly:

> "Your name is your most cherished private and personal possession. Other people may have the same name, and other people may spell it the same way, but your name, when spoken, and meant for you, is your most personal and private possession. To all intents and purposes, then, you equate your name with yourself."

And then I think it was he (bear with me for the moment)...I think it was he

who offered this kind of an illustration to the students: if a student found himself walking down the hall of a classroom building, or coming in quite unexpectedly to a fraternity room, and he's discovered that his name has been mentioned, and then there's a kind of titter that goes throughout the group, a kind of ridicule, a kind of down-grading of character at the mention of a person's name.....Dr. Carlson observes that the student can't possibly go to bed at night and say, "I'll think nothing more of it. They really weren't talking about me....they were just talking about my name." According to Hebrew tradition, a name was given to a person because this was what he was, this is what he is, this is what he was intended to become.

Now by the very same token, you can't divorce God from His name. As God is holy, so His name is to be kept holy, and never taken in vain. The ancient Hebrews believed this so fervently, mark you well, that for a long period in their history they never so much as pronounced the name of God... ...the name was that holy, they would not even so much as form it with their lips. With this kind of behavior on their part, they were simply reminding themselves of the pure and supreme character that God is. For a certain period in their history they never even so much as shared the name of God with the heathen, because they didn't want the heathen to defile the name of God by pronouncing it. This is true.

The name of God reveals what God is. That's why, then, God places this as second in the Commandments..."I am the Lord your God -- no other gods"..... ..." - -"and I have a name, and My name is to be kept holy -- not taken in vain."

There's never enough time to say in a twenty-minute sermon what needs to be said. Let's hurry along as best we can.

Why, then, is this Commandment broken so easily? Is it because we have become thoughtless creatures? And just because we are thoughtless, does that make a sin any less? When people take God's name in vain, they commit at least three different kinds of sin, and each, I submit to you, is equally insidious.

There is the sin of profanity....swearing, cursing, as we understand it, and dragging God's name down into the dust.....

> ...did you ever stop to think what we're actually doing, when a man says so easily, "God damn you!"? To begin with, we're asking God to do something that's absolutely alien to His character! God just doesn't jump when we talk to Him, and certainly never when we talk to Him like that! And God doesn't know a measure of delight in consigning people to Hell. The character of God is such that He's come that people might be saved, not damned. When a man talks like that, he's defiling not only the name of God but also His own character...
>
> ...with complete candor -- "Aw, hell!" ...according to the Biblical tradition, Hell is reserved for those who are completely alienated from God...and even to use an expression such as that, profanely. In Catechetical class sometimes we say to the boys and girls, instead of using the name God to damn somebody, use the name of your dad, use the name of

your mother....and they shudder at the thought -- despite the fact that there might be a generation gap!...they still have enough sense to know that they can't possible do that, because Dad and Mother still stand for something over and above them, protectors, providers, necessary agents in God's plan.

And the second sin is frivolity, when even in a jocular way one takes the name of God and speaks in a light, frivolous or facetious manner...

....this, too, drags the name of God down into the dust, and is sinful.

And the last of the trilogy -- hypocrisy.....

...to use God's name vainly is to fulfill the role of the hypocrite. Of all the applications that might be considered here, it's when you and I, who are named for God in baptism, fail to fulfill the obligations that rest upon those who are named for God....we live the life of the hypocrite.

So God says to us, as He gave the Law....

-- and why did He give the Law? -- to protect

His creation!

....He put second in His listing: "Watch out how you use My name -- never vainly." ...but rather, as you know, the positive way as Luther reminds us.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Second Sunday After The Epiphany January 14, 1968

"ONE-DAY-IN-SEVEN"
(Exodus 20:8)

Had you been a tourist back in the late 40's and the early 50's and had been traveling in London, undoubtedly you might have been impressed by a very clever picture poster to be found in one of the compartments of a London train. The artist has drawn an elephant, an elephant with a knot tied into his tail. And underneath is the message, the message presumably directed to tourists who are prone to forget things....the simple statement is a question: Have You Forgotten Your Luggage?

The proverbial elephant who never forgets anything may still, in this rapid age of ours, need to have a knot tied into his tail. Those of us who travel through life in this mad and terrific pace which becomes our generation may of necessity be reminded again and again...."Have you forgotten anything? -- is there something in the past that you ought not to leave behind? is there something of the past that you may still find useful?" It's in this manner and its mood that we come again to the discussion of the Ten Commandments. For most certainly the Ten Commandments belong to us out of the past, but so far as we know, God has not changed His mind and said, "They belong only to the past."

Dr. Terrance Findley is the very able rector of that magnificent Episcopal church in New York City that's known as St. Bartholomew. He recalls how some time ago he and his wife were invited to visit in a home of a young couple who were quite proud of the fact that as they moved into their

new home they could furnish it very much to their liking. And as they moved from room to room it was clearly evident what their taste was, quite contemporary, every piece was modern.

When they finished the tour of the house, Dr. Findley made some kind of reference to the garage, and the reply of the young couple was, "But we don't use it to put the car in the garage - - you want to see what's out there?" So they invited Dr. Findley to visit the garage.

A modern-day adaptation of the old attic, that's what it was. They showed them a number of old pieces....and his eye fell on one in particular, something out of the past -- a chiffonier (it's a chest-of-drawers, isn't it?) ...and he said, "Tell me about this piece. Even its name sounds so strange in our modern day." The young woman said, "It's quite an heirloom. It belonged to my grandparents, and I remember how when I visited in their home they used it, and I remember the particular place where it was located. Then they wanted my parents to have it, and as I was growing up in my home we used it too. And because of our association with the past, Dad and Mother wanted us to have it. We brought it along with us. But it just doesn't fit in with our modern furniture. Out of respect for them, we can't quite give it up, so you see, we've stored it here in the garage. That's where it is now."

Is there a parable here, my friends? Could it be that that's the way it is with the Ten Commandments? - - something valued in the past, something used and cherished in the past, but somehow they just don't quite fit in with our modern way of life. Since we can't quite give them up, we'll tuck

them away somewhere. And the observation was made, then we tuck them away in the Church, and ask the Church to be the custodian of the past, of the heirlooms passed on down to us.....but we're not about to make full use of the,, but we'll store them somewhere.

If this is the generalization that can be made about the whole series of Ten Commandments, it's most particularly true about the Commandment that deals with the Lord's Day, or "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy" ....we won't have done with it completely, yet we're not about to use it as our forefathers did. So to keep our conscience somewhat clear, we'll ask the Church in its own way to take care of the Sabbath, or the Lord's Day.

Several years ago when visiting in Charlotte, North Carolina, a gentleman who was our host took us around the streets of Charlotte and pointed out with some degree of interest and pride this thing and that thing....and then he took us down in the business district and stopped his car and said, "Now look across to that department store - - it's unique." We were there in mid-week. Frankly, I didn't see anything at all unique about it. It had a very attractive and practical entrance....it had the usual number of display windows, with furniture items properly arranged. So I presume he waited for me to do exactly what I did, and I said, "And what's unique about it?"

He said, "The man who owns that department store is a God-fearing man, and he takes his religion seriously every day of the week - - so much so, that when Saturday night comes, he not only abides by the practice that the store will be closed Saturday night and not open again until Monday morning, but he also, some years back, issued this strange order, that the shades on

the windows of the store entrance will be pulled, and the shades on the display area of the whole front of the store will be completely drawn, so that even on the Lord's Day, while his store will be closed to business, he's not about even to allow the world to become interested in his merchandise by passing down the street and looking in at what he has to sell."

...call him an eccentric if you want to, surely it's a far cry to the practice of the observance of the Lord's Day in many different areas today.....but at least he took cognizance of the fact that there is to be something so <u>different</u> about <u>this day</u>.

I am convinced, after these years, to submit to you that if someone wanted to eradicate religion out of our lives, if someone purposed to eradicate religion out of our society, he would take a giant step forward in that direction, not by closing the doors of the house of worship, not by curtailing the activity in theological seminaries.....but he'd take a giant step forward by getting people to no longer observe the Sabbath, or the Lord's Day. It's amazing how much the full and complete observance of the Lord's Day acts out for us the drama of God's relationship to us, and when properly understood, the right observance of the Sabbath, or the Lord's Day, is God's way of implanting in our minds the truth of God Himself.

A few years ago I was completely intrigued, as was the whole audience of which I was part, by a young dynamic Jewish rabbi who was asked to speak to us about the practices of Judaism, and the history and the culture of his people. He unfolded for us in a very excellent manner how the devout Jew adheres to the customs of the past, so much so that even today in a devout Jewish home, things are being enacted and dramatized according to the tra-

dition of the Jew thousands of years ago. Someone was once asked to give the most important single argument, historically, for the existence of God. And mind you, the answer came back immediately: "the existence of the Jewish people." For in a certain sense (how you may weigh this as carefully as you wish) - - the Jewish people perhaps more than any other group, pass on from one generation to another the basic elements of their faith, as does no other current religious group.

Now, when you come to this business of the Sabbath, or the Lord's Day, observance, what will you make of it? For my own comfort I remind myself, despite the current trends, anything that's been part of our history for at least two thousand years or more is not simply going to be dropped by the wayside. We may tuck it away into some other place for storage and safe keeping, and we may unwittingly allow the Church to take care of the Lord's Day for us, that is, to schedule a service and to schedule a program....and we observe the Lord's Day as such when we're here.... ...but as soon as the Benediction is pronounced, you may allow yourself to believe that you're quite free to do anything else beyond these doors that you're accustomed to doing on Monday through Saturday - - - this might be a reading of our current generation.

But be that as it may, the fact is still that anything that's been around for about two thousand years may not be lost forever. And each generation may have to discover anew for itself why such a Commandmant remains - - "Remember" .....it may be a matter of effort....."Remember" - - "let me make that as direct and as imperative as I can - - make it your business to keep it there....make it your business to recall its significance."

Now, what is it? Why does it appear in the listing of the Ten? I can give you these reasons from the Bible. First off, we are told that when God created the world, this He did in six days. Then when the seventh day came, He stopped. What had been done had been accomplished, and the seventh day became a day of celebration, celebration of the fact that God's creative work had been done and the acknowledgment of what had been done.

Now take that for a moment. Are we to the place where we can acknowledge such an emphasis on this day? Do we not need such a time when we celebrate what God's creative energy has accomplished? Do we not need to set aside one day in the week to recognize what God has done for us? As the history of Israel went on, then they remembered that it was by the hand of God that they were delivered out of Egypt. And whenever they celebrated the Sabbath, they not only celebrated as the day that looked back upon God's creative work, but also they said to themselves: "This, too, our God has done for us. He has delivered us, He has made us free" - - and they concentrated on that fact, on a particular day.

Then as history developed and you come to the Christian era, and the Christians were overwhelmed by that tremendous truth that on the First Day of the week Jesus Christ arose - - "now redemption is full and free from sin and death".....so from that time on they began to say, "On this day in the week, which now for us is the first day, we will take time to recognize what God has done fully and completely for us." So at any period in history you recognize the fact that on this day we recognize what God has done for us. Therefore God gave us this day, for this purpose.

Now from a practical standpoint, I suppose a person has to reach a certain age when he begins to understand how much common sense there is to religion. This was clearly established in my mind, if I had ever doubted it before, as I began my ministry during the years of World War II. There was a man in the parish who came to me and said, "I can't take it any longer, Pastor, I just can't take it." I wondered what this thing was that he couldn't take any longer.

As he continued to speak, this is the way it came out. Bethlehem Steel has a wire rope mill in Williamsport. Because they, too, were caught up in the war production effort, they were working around the clock. He had just finished working seven weeks straight, seven days a week. So he said, "I just can't take it any longer."

So one thinks, of course, this is what God had in mind all along the line - - from a practical standpoint it should be a day of rest. Oddly enough, in recent times the labor unions seem to have out-run the Church. Who is pleading more now, these days, that such a thing should be recognized, than is the labor union in behalf of its people? Maybe we shouldn't worry too much about this "Remembering the day" - - thanks to labor, we're remembering it all right, and we're getting the time off.....but the note that has to be struck by the Church is "Remember.....to keep it holy." And if you want to do it, spell holy -- wholly -- wholly God's, and by that we mean that whatever happens on this day in the week, see that it's linked up wholly to God.

Be careful how you say it, friend. It's not that God is to be given one-day-out-of-seven; rather it's the recognition that must be given to His

special claim to one-day-in-seven. All time -- every day -- belongs to Him. And that we might recognize this completely, in His wisdom He has seen fit to say that there be one-day-in-seven when you especially remember this.

That shouldn't be hard for you to appreciate. A woman wants her husband to remember their wedding anniversary, especially so -- not that she doesn't want to be remembered on every other day in the course of the year, but hopefully if there's a special day when it's recalled, that this thing might spill over into every other day of the year.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Remarks made from lectern by Pastor Shaheen
Anniversary Sunday - January 14, 1968

As we recognize the fact that today is our Anniversary Sunday...it was 28 years ago on the second Sunday in January, even this very calendar date, when a group of people definitely committed themselves together as members of the Body of Christ to form Saint Luke Congregation.

I wish it were possible now for me to step aside, that there might be a parade to this lectern of different people, who know something from first-hand experience of those early years, who could tell you about Dr. Milton J. Bieber, who could tell you how when they met in borrowed places for five or six years - - the adjustment that had to be made every time they met.

I recall Laura Degen describing for me the Sunday morning worship in the Silver Theater, how when the people came together the first thing they had to do was to get things in order as over against the Saturday night movie, to improvise as best you can the holding of Sunday School sessions, to say nothing of the formal worship experience....and of the times they met in people's homes.....of the moment of decision - - to build or not to build? - - and if to build, how big? Haven't you heard it, when they did decide to build, they decided to build for a congregation four times their size! So they looked to the future and recognized an element of responsibility.

Somewhere here in the church, I don't know where it is now, there's an architectural model of this church building, and I presume the Christian Education facility as well....the Board of American Missions used to send that around to different synod meetings. It was held up as a model by which mission congregations might wish to follow. Just the other day someone picked up a church bulletin and found the photograph of a church in Ohio which is almost an exact duplicate of this structure.

But our concern is not with bricks and mortar. Wouldn't it be wonderful if, by the grace of God, the great King and Head of the Church would allow this church to become the model of conviction to truth, a model of peace and harmony among its people, a model of commitment to witness for Christ at home? May we strive for that, and be grateful for any opportunity that does allow it. In this moment I recognize the debt that all of us owe to every pastor, to every Church Councilman, to every worker, to every member of this congregation who by the grace of God have brought us to this day. Our debt is great.

* * * *

MS.

Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Fourth Sunday After the Epiphany **January 28, 1968**

"~~HALO-A-DAY~~"
(Sermon V: The Ten Commandments)

Whether we find it monotonous or burdensome, the fact remains that repetition is a necessity. Let me therefore, as I come to this sacred deak on this Sunday morning, remind you of the kind of thing we're trying to do on these Sunday mornings that we're spending together.

We're dealing with a study of the Ten Commandments. Let there be no misunderstanding as to the purpose and the intent. The Ten Commandments established clearly in the minds of the Children of Israel the fact of God. There's to be no question about His existence, and there's to be no question about the way He wants His world ordered and the way He wants men who live in His world to treat one another. Human as we are, we're inclined to forget that the world belongs to God. Human as we are, we're inclined ever so often to wrest the control of the universe out of the hands of God. Human as we are, we're prone to bow Him out of His world.

Someone has observed, and I think that I can quote him correctly: "At rediculously regular intervals in the pageant of world history, God is obsequiously bowed off the stage of human affairs and the curtain rung down on religion. It happened in latter-day Rome, didn't it? - in revolutionary France, it happened in Soviet Russia....and within the knowledge of many of us in this place, in Nazi Germany. And there are those who tell us that it's happening right now in so-called humanistic America. No wonder Gamaliel Bradford wrote not so long ago a deliciously satirical epitaph for piety entitled: "Exit God" - -

Let his words, momentarily at least, speak to our condition now:

"Of old our fathers' God was real
Something they almost saw,
Which kept them to a stern ideal
And scourged them into awe.

They walked the narrow path of right
Most vigilantly well,
Because they feared eternal might
And boiling depths of hell.

Now hell has wholly boiled away
And God become a shade.
There is no place for Him to stay
In all the world He made.

The followers of William James
Still let the Lord exist,
And call Him by inposing names,
A venerable list.

But nerve and muscle only count,
Gray matter of the brain,
And an astonishing amount
Of inconvenient pain.

I sometimes wish that God were back
In this dark world and wide;
For though some virtues He might lack,
He had His pleasant side."

We might not be nearly as satirical as Bradford, but the fact remains that man goes on having his moments when he does wish that God were back. It's pure Hell without Him, and life has a way of spelling this fact out for us in clear bold letters. So you and I have come, these Sunday mornings, trying to refresh our minds in the fact of God, particularly as He laid down the law, trying not to be shocked overmuch that He does reveal Himself as the authoritarian figure. Maybe it can be said in this way: long before Israel ever learned to call Him Father, they were in duty bound to recognize Him as law-giver, to the end that when they did recognize Him as the Father of the

Chosen People, they gave Him due and proper honor as the authoritative one.

Today in our study it's the Commandment that has four plain words:

"Thou shalt not kill."

I suppose if the Commandments depended upon a popularity rating, this is the one in the ten that would never be taken out of the list. From a purely human point of view, this is the Commandment we really want most. For every man prizes life, especially his own. And each of us wants to live in a society where life can be protected, where life might be considered sacred, whether we have a God or not. So let me say again, if you'd have to rate the Commandments, this is the one you would want least to be removed -- keep it somewhere in ordered society, that men should not be made free to roam hither and yon, killing whomsoever they wish, at whatever whim or fancy may possess them.

Well, the Commandment is there, whether it's there because of our popularity rating or not, it's there because of the high value that God places on it. And as was said last Sunday, you can divide the Commandments into two sections, and this latter section deals specifically with our relationship one to another. And once God has told us the responsibility that we owe to our elders, and those whom He has delegated as being responsible heads over us, now He goes on ever so quickly to speak to all of us, as human beings, and says, THOU SHALT NOT KILL.

I wish I could tell you that it's easily understood. Quite frankly, it's not easily understood -- until later on in this sermon we might bring it into focus through the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ. Let these words "Thou shalt not kill" - - - if you take them at face value, what do they mean? Taken at face value, it would mean that all of us would become vegetarians! Taken at

face value, you'll have no Sunday roast today when you sit down for dinner. Even as we read the history of Israel, there were allowances that Moses the Law-giver gave, as far as this Commandment was concerned. It might surprise you a bit to know that even out of the history of Israel, there was such a thing -- it almost made it mandatory that the next-of-kin would seek avenge when someone near and dear to him had been murdered.....that it was not only expected, but almost mandatory, that the male next-of-kin would almost travel the world over until he had traced down the murderer of someone in his family circle.

There were certain allowances made in Old Testament days for this Commandment, and you have only to read all that follows in the Book of Exodus, all the way through to the end of the Old Testament -- what do you have but one chain of battle after another, one seemingly endless conflict, one period of war following another, even in which God was called upon to give a blessing upon Israel, and to delight in the death of Israel's enemies! It is a Commandment that's not easily understood, if you simply take it, and read four words, and say this is it.

What, now, shall we make of the Commandment? What can I say to you that might hold you in good stead?

There was a reading of this Commandment that went like this....not: Thou shalt not kill" - - but rather - - "Thou shalt not do murder." Do I have to come to this sacred desk to preach to people such as you, that you're not to become murderers? There was a time perhaps, in the history of the Church, in its earliest days, when perhaps a preacher had to do this! You have no

weapons concealed, have you? Each of us is perfectly relaxed this morning. The last thing that might enter any man's mind as we come is that before the hour of worship would be over, that murder might be committed here! Is this Commandment still relevant?

Well, let's push the thing back a bit farther now, as far back as we can go. Why was the Commandment given in the first place? This is the question that must be asked.

The Commandment was given in the first place that man might understand that God is the Creator and Giver of life, and that God looks upon all life as sacred.....all life is sacred. This is why even in the early days it was allowed, that if a man should take another man's life, that his life in turn should be taken - - - not that the latter deed would be a violation of the basic principle, but that the latter deed might be an expression of what was maintained by the Commandment itself. Life is that sacred.

Why is life sacred? Because man is made, in the language of the Bible, in the image of God.....and therefore every single human being on the face of the earth is an expression of God! Not that you may want to press it too far, but surely you can't ignore -- I should say this even quite parenthetically, but there is that of God in every man, and therefore when God spells out the rules for his children, He says it is not within your right to kill, because life itself is sacred - - "It is sacred because I give it." Whatever you think of the Fifth Commandment, this Commandment, when you come to understand it, remember full well that therefore, from God's point of view, there is no life without meaning, there is no life save that it has some purpose to be fulfilled.....there is no life without meaning. There is no single person to whom life is given except there is a purpose to be fulfilled in God's

plan.

How, then, can we apply this Commandment to our day - - what can we say now to make it a matter of relevance? Let me suggest a thing or two for you.

God has given each of us life. He who eats and drinks to excess puts himself in a position where he becomes eventually a destroyer of life. Can you understand this?

> ....our younger friends -- who are tempted to tamper with drugs, narcotics -- are tampering with those things which can destroy what God has given. A precious figure of speech that ought to be remembered by every person who takes the name of Christ is that his body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and we have no right to allow anything to develop that would eventually destroy the very things that God has given us as our most useful vehicle while we are here on earth!
>
> ....to any man who sits behind the steering column of an automobile.... when he sits behind that steering wheel, God holds him responsible for his frame of mind, for whatever he has taken into his body, that might limit his capability through skill and alertness to direct and control the instrument beneath his hands.....

Must I remind you that in the Old Testament days, if a wild ox would gore a man, and if it could be proven that again and again this ox had been of that type of behavior pattern - - they killed not only the ox, but the owner as well....

> ...an automobile that's deliberately allowed to go out of control, by one who does not deliberately control his body, is far worse than a wild ox.

You are expecting some word about the business of war....THOU SHALT NOT KILL. If we were to take these words just as they appear, every single one of us, then, would be in duty bound to become pacifists. But we happen to live in a world where there are not perfect people. Pacificism goes down the drain immediately, when by force even to take my life you would take the life of someone near and dear to me. I have not come to this sacred desk to argue for you the basic principles for or against a so-called "just" war. This I am not prepared to do.

I only know that we happen to live in the kind of a world which is stained by original sin. And the fact of sin will always make it difficult for us to obey what God commands.....and that our problem of problem remains: not in deciding what is black and what is white, but how to run one's course in defense of life itself, in a sea of varying shades of gray.

I have wrestled far more than any of you may ever realize with what is happening in South Vietnam. And there are times when I wish I could come before you and denounce every aspect of our involvement. But in good conscience, I have never been able quite to do that. But I have come prepared to denounce something - - - the fact that you and I can look upon a television screen and see the instruments of death over which we have control, wrecking death upon innocent children....the bodies of children irreparably damaged, if not destroyed, by napalm - - - and you and I should view it with apparent indifference!.....as though just because there are so many of them, that life would be cheap and less than sacred.

I tell you, it isn't just enough to say that every child is some mother's child. How I wish we could begin at that point, if we couldn't begin anywhere else. But from a Christian point of view, it must also be said, every single

human being, whatever his color, whatever his culture, whatever his deprivation, whatever his disadvantages, whatever his sins, whatever his foibles.... ...every single humen being is no less than a child of God -- upon whom God has stamped His image.

Now the concluding section of this sermon.

You can't understand what God meant by it when He gave it to Moses. You ought to be able to understand the interpretation that Jesus Christ placed upon it, or the amplification, when in the 5th chapter of Matthew He said:

"You have heard of old time, You shall not kill, You shall not murder, but I say unto you . . . "

...and then He talked about the attitude of a man...the disposition that a man might have toward another human being.....He talked about the things that swell up within a man's soul, which forces you and me to say, once we've dealt with His words, that the real murder may not be so much the murder of the hand as the murder of the heart.

Now that you can understand, can't you? We're not about to have a searching crew go up and down the aisles of this church looking for concealed weapons -- that would be the least of the things that might interest some of us, a futile search indeed. But I wonder what might happen if the X-Ray of God came upon each of us to search the soul, even among us.....how much might be revealed of hate, and envy, and jealousy, and the basic principles of alienation that exist within us, the allowances that we give ourselves that we're superior to others.....but that there are some folk who are a little farther down the ladder of salvation than we!

...well that's something to think about, isn't it?

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Septuagesima Sunday February 11, 1968

"ON DEPOSIT BY GOD" (Exodus 20:15)
(Sermon VII: The Ten Commandments)

As David begins his final quarter in the theological seminary, he continues to speak with appreciation for certain professors who have won a warm spot in his heart and surely in his mind. Among them is Dr. Martin Heinecken, who currently has been teaching a course for seniors in the theological seminary that deals with the great religious themes to be found in modern drama - - a rather intriguing and fascinating thing to do.

I suppose every preacher waits for courage to do the things that he would like to do. Here's admission from this one preacher in your midst, the desire to one day preach a series of sermons, taking the titles and captions of certain books, and talking about the religious themes and overtones that you find so very cleverly revealed in even the title of a book. Take such a book as "By Love Possessed," - - or the book that I'm currently reading, not a very large book, but an excellent antidote to the 'God is dead' business. It has the very interesting title of only two words: "Him Again," - - illustrating God's continuing appearance throughout history.....Him again.

And one could take the titles given to songs - - "Tout Jour, L'Amour, Tout Jour" - - any number of titles, and then to talk about the religious themes, the implication, the application.

Well, for our purpose this morning....stride along with me now in the Times Square of a few years ago, and begin to detect something of the reli-

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany February 4, 1968

"THE HIGH COST OF LOW-LEVEL LIVING" (Exodus 20:14)
(Sermon VI: The Ten Commandments)

A visitor of the Prague some years ago gained for himself the enviable privilege of going to the home of Katherine Breschkovsky. The name doesn't register, does it? What a pity. They tell me she was a most remarkable woman. She's been referred to as the "Lincoln of the emancipation of the Russian people" - - doing more, perhaps, for the common man in Russia than any other person who lived during her lifetime, a rather incredible thing to say about a single person.

At the time of the interview she was 82 years of age. Fifty of those 82 years had already been spent in prison or in exile. And once, during an eight-year stretch, she was in solitary confinement on an island north of Archangel.

When the interview was over, the young American thanked her profusely. He said, "When I go back to America, I will tell everybody I meet about the wonderful things you are doing for the common people of Russia."

There was a look of protest on her face, and she shook her head...."No -- No -- don't talk like that! What I am doing I am not doing just for the common people of Russia. What I am doing I am doing in the interest of mankind everywhere. Always remember, my children - - " (and these are her exact words) - - the most beautiful thing in the world is a human soul."

All this she re-iterated in a letter sometime later, and these are her words....."Children must learn to admire God's beautiful creations, must under-

stand that the greatest miracles are the world, the universe, containing in it the millions of miracles, worthy to be admired and studied. They must learn that the human soul is the greatest among them, and that it is our duty to keep it safe from all that would injure the laws of the Creator, who wishes to see us progress in our spiritual, mental and physical life."

Katherine Breschkovsky, whether you know it or not, when you spoke like that, you are echoing the thoughts of God, for anyone who has given God more than even secondary attention has to register on the diary of his soul that the chiefest of all God's concerns is what happens to a human being. God made us, and God gave us life, and when God made us He stamped upon us His image.

All this leads me to say to you as I come today to the study of the Commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" -- to observe that God is at one and the same time the supreme enthusiast, the supreme optimist, and also at the same time, the supreme realist. God knows what we're capable of becoming. God made us to wear angels' wings, God made us to be topped by halos. And when His Son was here on earth, this is one of the things that Jesus was always doing as He went from person to person, and trying to lift their sights, and getting them to see the person that they were meant to become. We were not meant simply to be as animals, but we were meant to reflect something of the mind and spirit of God Himself.

An angelic quality, scarcely discernible at times, most times, is still something with which God endowed us. And as He goes on reminding Himself of this fact, He remains the supreme optimist, the supreme enthusiast, concerning human nature.

But He's also the realist. He knows that it's not always easy for us

to be good. He knows that one of the things that can be said about human nature is that, left to itself, it might ever so much more often prefer evil than good. If it weren't for certain inhibitions and certain aspects of training and conditioning, each of us would go straight to Hell. You can put it that way. God who made us knows that this is always a possibility. And if this should occur, then something happens to His dream for us.

And among the dreams that God has for us is the ordering of society with a high regard for the basic unit which is the family. Significantly enough, in the study of the Commandments you come now to this one which immediately follows the Commandment "Thou shalt not kill." - - which is simply to say that all of life is sacred and every single person is considered in God's plan as a life with meaning. And once God has said "Thou shalt not kill" -- placing the highest value upon the sacredness of life, now He turns His attention to the family.....and of all the aspects of society, nothing is more sacred than the family. And that God's purposes which He has in mind for the family might be fulfilled, in our behalf He says, Thou shalt not commit adultery.'

When I was a lad I worked on a milk route. We chopped ice in the summer time and put it upon the milk crates to keep the milk cold, covered it with canvas, picked up the tickets that sold for a dollar for ten. One day on the route the man who owned the route said, 'Here he comes'....and I wondered what he meant. 'He' was an inspector who was let loose, buying quarts of milk at random in order to test for their purity. He made his purchase from our wagon. Then the man who owned the route told me what was going to hap-

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pen. He said, "He's going to make his tests. There are certain standards that must be maintained if purity is to be had. He'll be checking as to whether or not we've adulterated the milk - - "

....that good word, you see, adulterate

...to adulterate something is to make it less than what it was intended to be

...to adulterate something is to cheapen it

...to adulterate something is to take away its aspect of purity.....

God knows what He had in mind in the establishment of a family. He set a highest standard for it. And in order that that standard might be maintained, He said in no uncertain manner - - "Don't commit adultery"

...don't cheapen it....don't allow it to become less than what it was meant to be.

There isn't a single person among us who doesn't understand the meaning of the Commandment. But alas for us in our day, there are those who tell us that the "New Morality" (and I use the "New Morality" in quotes), offers us a measure of freedom - - - that these Commandments, these restrictions, are not to be obeyed -- that they handicap us, that they impede our growth and development, they deny us self-expression.

Someone has observed that in the past sixty years, civilization has been transformed in the sense that it had never experienced changes in all preceding history - - imagine it! -- in a half century plus one decade, more changes than at any other time since the dawn of history!

And in those changes we've gotten strange, peculiar philosophies.

One of them is a kind of morality that says, the old notions are passe.

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And because of our emphasis on that kind of morality, we've allowed ourselves a new freedom, in sexual behavior and in sexual philosophy.....so much so, that from what one reads, sees and hears these days, one could be led to believe that ~~sex~~ sin is something that we've discovered. And how we exploit it. Is there anything that's being put on the market these days that isn't geared to us from a sexual appeal? Out of Madison Avenue the amount of clothing that a woman wears, or does not wear, is very important in the promotion of a certain product - - for any product.....

....for the cartoonist, the way the woman's face is drawn, to make sure that there's the slightest hint of seduction might not be overlooked...

...they even use sex appeal to sell refrigerators. What a pre-occupation we have with sex.

How foolish can we get? Sex is as old as the human race. What we need to discover is that God, creator and giver of life, knows what He's talking about when He talks about sex...And when He laid down for us a basic standard for sexual behavior in the Commandment "Thou shalt not commit adultery" ...and until that day comes, we're not as smart or as shrewd as we're meant to be.

Now let's look at some of the things that are being taught us in this day:

- - pre-marital sex is perfectly all right because chances are you won't get caught.....EDGE is the name of the youth publication of our church. A current issue has the sad recital of girls who spell the lie to such a notion.....

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-- extra-marital relationship is quite all right, they tell us, because this new emancipation says that sex was meant to be enjoyed -- anywhere -- any time -- with anyone. As a prediction of things yet to come, they tell us that it won't be long that over in England, on British television screens, that the viewer will be able to see two people completing the act of an adulterous relationship. It's quite all right, they tell us -- it's a game, just like tennis is a game, and if two people agree, let them go ahead -- it's their decision...

> ....there are many women who will tell you that as far as they're concerned, sex isn't a game. For in sex there is the total response of a person to another person. And when God allowed it this way, it was meant to be beautiful....
>
> ...complete identification....union, body, mind and soul.

-- they also tell us that sex is an appetite. Appetites ought to be satisfied.

> ....how foolish can one get! You know what happens to people who go on eating and eating and eating, just because they have an appetite that needs to be satisfied. You know what happens to people who go on drinking, just because they have a thirst that needs to be satisfied...satisfied....
>
> ...satisfied! When God made us He gave us the appetite. But also when God made us, He gave us a measure of control, and a measure of discipline, that a thing might come into its fulfillment.

Sex is beautiful. When God made us, God made us that we might experience

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it, and that all that we are might be expressed in this way. From the Book of Common Prayer, or at least in the Anglican Prayer Book, the Church of England, when the groom slips the ring on the finger of the bride, he recites these words, "With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee honor, with my worldly goods I thee endow." We who try to be so noble are part of a generation that's taken these words out of the marriage service, and we're the poorer because of it. For God has ordained that sex is something that belongs within the marriage vow. That's where it belongs.

And yet with all the ardor of my soul I wish I could say to those who are young, who comprise, whether they realize it or not, a "gimme" generation -- always grabbing and reaching.....and this in itself may not be necessarily bad, if they realize that when somebody takes anything, it involves responsibility. In the Old Testament days, when a man and a woman engaged in the act of sexual relationship, sexual intercourse, the Old Testament had a magnificent word for it -- they knew one another. There was complete response. There was complete identification.

Why, then, all the extra-marital relationships? Why, then, should this be a problem for many people, far more than we might realize, far more than we might care to admit?

Well one could be, the very unfortunate notion that we have here in the West, that romance is always tied up with marriage, and people think they are in love, and then people get married because they think they are in love. It would be an easy thing to apply the truth of this Commandment if anywhere one could find everyone whose marriage was made in heaven. But we have to give up that notion, don't we, that all marriages are made in heaven? And we've got to give up the notion, too, that whenever people get married, it

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doesn't necessarily follow that they have a Christian understanding of marriage. But God has His understanding of what marriage was meant to be, and God's going to go on believing in what He feels so strongly marriage ought to be.

So suppose people do fall out? Suppose they are no longer in love with one another? Suppose she's no longer attractive to him? -- he's no longer attractive to her? From God's point of view, this does not allow extra-matital relationships. For with the Christian understanding of love there's always the word loyalty, to be faithful. And when a couple is married, promises are made - - not as long as she's attractive.....not simply as long as she holds her weight and her figure to a particular pattern - - the promise is made "until death separates us." So the faithfulness continues.

You see what God has in mind? God is love. And God is loyal to us. God does not say, "My relationship with you becomes broken as soon as you find yourselves becoming unattractive to me." While we are yet sinners, God loves us. And as we want God to be loyal to that noble dream, so God says, "You be loyal to that dream, one with another."

And don't you know this, my friend, don't you know this - - it's a rare thing that any of us is ever at his best. And if ever the worst side of our nature is revealed, unfortunately, it's within the circle of those who are nearest and dearest to us. I don't know what would happen to us if we were always dependent upon some kind of an outside stimulus to be faithful. A well-groomed woman and a well-groomed man may help! -- of course it does....but marriages were not meant to depend upon the frequency of visits to a beauty parlor.

Now one final word. Suppose you've broken the Commandment. Is there anyone who has kept all of the Commandments? Sin is sin in God's sight. But God hasn't given up His dream, and because He goes on believing in our capability,

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He offers forgiveness. Once when God's Son was here on earth (how He detested the sight of them) the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees came and brought a woman that they had caught in the act of adultery. They even told Him so, and they reached for stones to kill her, because adultery was punishable by death by stoning. And they waited to hear what the prophet of Nazareth would say.

He never so much as said a word when they brought her to Him. He looked down on the sand and then with His finger He wrote in the sand....and to this day nobody quite knows what it was that He wrote.....and then He lifted His eyes, and never so much as having looked at the woman, and He said to the men, "He who is without sin, let him cast the first stone at her."....and then without so much as looking at the woman, again He wrote in the sand....and then He lifted His eyes and He said, "Woman, where are your accusers?" And of course by this time they had gone away. And she said, "I see no man." ....and He said to her, "Neither do I condemn thee. Go -- and sin no more."

.....another indication that God doesn't give up His dream for what we're meant to become in our relationship, within the family circle.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Septuagesima Sunday February 11, 1968

"ON DEPOSIT BY GOD" (Exodus 20:15)
(Sermon VII: The Ten Commandments)

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And one could take the titles given to songs -- "Tout Jour, L'Amour, Tout Jour" -- any number of titles, and then to talk about the religious themes, the implication, the application.

Well, for our purpose this morning....stride along with me now in the Times Square of a few years ago, and begin to detect something of the reli-

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gious theme that you find in commercial advertising. Eventually anyone who visits New York City may end up in Times Square. And the ad copy writer always considers it a prize moment when what he's worked on might be displayed in Times Square. This one of a few years ago: the cartoonist has done his work....there's the caricature of today's man in the gray flannel suit, heading for the Big City, heavily laden down with suit-cases. And then you're given to understand that this cartoon introduces the fact that this is an advertisement for the motion picture film, "The Rat Race".....and underneath the drawing of the man heavily laden with suit-cases (a rather youthful figure at that) this description - - Tony Curtis is Pat, the Ambitious Guy From Milwaukee - - Debbie Reynolds is Peggy, the Dime-A-Dance Gal - - They Are Two Hopefuls Who Are Willing To Do Anything.....Claw, Steal, Kill...To Get Ahead in the Rat Race.

The ad writer has done his day's work. Now you and I are left to ponder - - is this an apt description of today's youth?....willing to do anything -- claw, steal, kill -- to get ahead in the rat race? Or is it simply not true?

Also quickly to be asked: is this the only way that one gets ahead in today's world? was Jesus Christ talking with tongue-in-cheek when He said something about "Blessed are the meek"?.....so you and I find ourselves here in this solemn assembly, asking ourselves the question: does the world belong only to those who have disregard for God's commandments? - - that he who wins in the rat race, whatever else he does, surely he will steal?

I'm not here to argue the point. I know that there are those who live

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their lives on this premise. I know also that whatever sanity remains in this world is here because there were those who deliberately and honestly endeavored to live their lives according to God's law and according to God's love.

And I also know that whenever any man disobeys God's law, he does so at the risk of great peril. Whether he is religious or not, the fact of life simply bears it out, and as you have heard it implied before, in a certain sense we don't break the Commandments, but when we disobey they break us! God and life are that interchanged....His principles are that clearly spelled out.

Now today in our series we come to the Commandment: "Thou Shalt Not Steal." Whatever priority you give these Commandments, you have to admit that the first one must always remain first....

"I am the Lord your God -- no other Gods before me"

If you don't keep that one where it belongs, then all the others have little meaning. So God, the authoritarian, establishes it very clearly at the very beginning....."You begin with Me, and you order all of your relationships on the basis of My relationship to you and your relationship to Me." But if you want to give some kind of priority listing to the others, maybe you'll have to accept that God knew what He was doing when He gave them to Moses exactly as He did. And so you might see in the sequence, then, that this one belongs where it belongs.

But you might say to yourself, if God is spirit, and if God deals with things of spiritual worth, why then does God talk about property? Haven't we always been led to believe that we're to take a detached attitude toward the

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things of this world? Isn't it a basic Christian understanding that a man ought not to be too concerned about materialistic things? Yet, then, why should God, even in the beginning days of the Children of Israel, spell out for them a commandment that deals with property - - I thought God was only interested in people.....

...so you can readily understand the worth of the other Commandments....

"Honor your parents - - "

...God wants us to see these people as His agents

"Honor your teachers and those in authority over you - - "

...God wants you to see these people as His representatives, God's interested in people...

"Thou shalt not kill"

...life is so sacred that every single person who lives is no less than a child of God, and the halo should never be snatched from his head... ...you can understand this because God's interested in people...

"You shall not commit adultery"

...this you can understand because God's interested in the sanctity of interpersonal relationships, in the most imtimate of ways.....this you can understand.

But now to say that God's interested in property! I thought God was interested only in persons. But an acid test of character for any person is how he handles the things that he calls his own. The New Testament may remind

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us that we are to have a detached attitude toward things. The New Testament may remind us that we can't take it with us. But the New Testament also says very clearly that God expects us to be a good steward of the things that we own, and a high regard for the things that other people possess.

It's very interesting to note that when God gave these Commandments, and includes this one on property, that He gave them to a group of people who had practically nothing. They had no bank balances...not a single one possessed a key to a safe deposit box somewhere....they had no stock certificates ....they had no deeds to an acre of land....they had no houses. They were a people simply on the march, and perchance the only thing that any man might call his own was what he was able to carry in his hand, and what he had on his back. Yet to these people who had practically nothing, God at the very beginning says, "I want to talk to you about property."

Now let me tell you what you already know. When a man has property, when a man has any kind of possessions, he gets them in one of three ways, or he gets them in only three ways.

One, he gets them because he works for them, by the sweat of his brow, he buys this, he earns that, and it becomes very precious to him. Naturally so. And there are those who tell us that the things that we prize most are ofttimes the things that we work the hardest for.

A man may come into possession of something because somebody out of love gives it to him. It may be of much monetary value, it may be of little monetary value, yet they're prized because someone out of love gave them. In the transition from 9219 Manchester Road to 919 Highland Drive, oddly enough, of all our earthly goods, the only barrel to be dropped by the workmen con-

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tained certain items of prized glass that were handed down to Winifred, from her mother, who got them from her mother, and perhaps even farther back than that. Whether we'll collect damages or not remains beside the point. They happen to be something that she could call her own, prized and cherished, because they were given.

A man may have what he may call his own because he has worked for it... ...it's in his possession because it's been given to him.....or still another way. He happens to have it in his possession because he stole it, by stealth or force, he deliberately took it from somebody else, who up to that moment prized it and cherished it as his very own. God looks with favor upon the first two ways - - God expects us to work, and God expects a man to earn the things that he might be able to bring into his possession.....and God, who is Love, surely smiles favorably upon those who gladly and willingly take of what they have and give to somebody else. But concerning stealing? God says NO. Thou shalt not steal.

Now there are reasons behind this of course, and if you're the kind of person who wants to press, and always say, why? - why? - why?.....well it so happens that when a man steals he violates the character of somebody else and destroys his faith in human nature. And God made us to trust and to believe one another. And when a man himself steals, he violates a God-given blessing that has been bestowed upon him by which he was meant to work and to earn what could be his.....and he short-circuits God's plan for his own personal development of integrity.

Another reason that could be given is this: that Christians, of all people, live by the very fantastic notion that maybe when it's all said and done, none of us owns anything! That is a fantastic notion. But Christians with

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their understanding of God begin with the premise that everything belongs to God. God is the giver of all things, and that in a certain sense, whatever you and I have we have on deposit by God. On more than one page in the Bible God is pictured as the Great Depositor. Now one who deposits does not relinquish his claim. At any time He may appear, holding us responsible for what we happen to have which is rightfully His. So the Christian looks upon property. It's not really ours; God is the owner of all things. A fantastic notion? Of course! But they tell me that those who have gotten the greatest satisfaction out of life on this earth are people who live by this understanding. Look, therefore, not only upon God as the Great Law-giver, but look upon Him then as the Great Depositor, who holds us responsible for what we do with what He puts in front of us. Eventually it can be said that a test of character is this: tell me how a man uses things, and I'll tell you the kind of man he is.

How different this whole world would be if all of us remembered this Commandment, in the most subtle of all ways, as it may be applied to our daily life. There was a man who was complaining to the chap in his car pool, "I just wish today's churches would get over to our youngsters these basic rules of honesty. My boy went off to school with a set of pencils....somebody stole them. It isn't the value, the cost of the pencils, that bothers me so much, it's the principle. As far as the value is concerned - - they didn't cost me anything....I simply brought them home from the office....." How different this world would be if in all of our relationships we remember that there might be such a thing as the stretching forth of a hand, grasping for something that just doesn't belong to him. Maybe the way to teach the

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meaning of the Commandment is to begin with the little things.

Every sermon, to a degree, as you well know, is autobiographical. To the day that I die I'll be eternally grateful for that mother of mine. Unlettered, fifty years ago I don't think that she ever knew there was such a word as "childhood" and "later adolescense" -- psychologically speaking. But one day she discovered I had three pennies in my hand -- that she hadn't given me. And as mothers can find out things, she found out that I had stolen those three pennies....and she used the word.

> ...she might have said to herself, only three pennies -- it doesn't matter much....and she might have ignored it.
>
> ...in today's society, sophisticated as we are, she might have said, "What will this do to Raymond's personality? If I force the issue, and bring this thing out in the open -- what kind of a guilt complex will he forever drag along behind him?"

She never reasoned like that. She only knew one thing, that one of her boys had taken three pennies that didn't belong to him. So she said, "Raymond, take them back. They're not yours!" And to this very day, whenever I'm inclined to reach for anything that doesn't belong to me, I hear ringing in my ears...."It's not yours."

God says, "Don't steal." For when it's all said and done, the terrible fact is this, that all thievery is a theft against God. Oh, I wish I had time to spell it out for you in many ways...the way you rob a man of a good reputation....the way you rob a man of his possibilities for future growth and development by the doubts that you keep in your mind concerning him...the way you rob a child from his chance to grow by making mistakes. Who hasn't lived long enough to be able to spell out the list for himself. "Thou shalt not steal" says God....He loves us that much, that He says, live by this restraining influence.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Prayer by Pastor Shaheen
February 11, 1963

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O GOD, out of all that we have, we return unto Thee a portion. Wilt Thou bless what we bring. Teach us to use aright what we continue to retain. Have mercy upon us that we do not offer Thee more.

O GOD, be with Thy Church throughout the world. May Thy ministering servants perform their role in Thy Name in love and in truth.

O GOD, be with those who agonize in conscience as they find themselves in a world torn by strife.

O GOD, give wisdom to those who sit in high places, that the ills of mankind may not be continued.

O GOD, help us to find the ways by which we can end the strife in all parts of our society, pastirularly as we think of South-east Asia. Be with our sons and daughters who wear the uniform of our country.

FORGIVE each of us, O God, his sin, and keep before us the hope of Heaven, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord.

OUR FATHER.....

Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Sexagesima Sunday February 18, 1968

"NO SINGLE ACCOMMODATION" (Exodus 20:16)
(Sermon VIII: The Ten Commandments)

God ofttimes is pictured in many ways. It's not the exception when people think of Him as someone with a heavy hand, who is doing nothing but dealing out restrictions, forever saying - - "Don't do this - - don't do this - - don't do this." That's the way some people think of the Ten Commandments....nothing but a series of "Thou shalt not - - ".

One of the early lessons that all of us needs to master in life perhaps is this: that a heavy hand, wielded in love, is an absolute necessity. Any parent who is about to discharge his obligation in behalf of the children whom God has entrusted in his care, must ever so often wield the heavy hand, and always out of love.

Having said this, perhaps now we can also say that as we look at the Ten Commandments, they are given to us because God remains a keen student of human nature. He who made us is always observing us. And one of the true readings of God is this - - that He remains forever interested in His world, forever interested in His children. And as He allows them a measure of life, He's always observing and taking note of how they get along, what progress they're making, and how through their own folly, every now and then they trip themselves. And it's not easy to arise.

Surely He also notes how those of us who are the pilgrims of the way on occasion become lost and confused. So God out of love speaks absolutely,- - hands down His series of "Thou shalt nots" or His "Thou shalt". So we look at the Ten Commandments. Accept them, then, my friend, as coming from some-

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one who loves us, and out of love gives us the series.

There's also this way of looking at it, that in the Ten Commandments you have a series dealing with the bonds that hold society together. God gave us a social nature. We mature and develop according to our interplay with other people. It is not intended that man should be alone - - he is by nature social. God who placed us in families, has placed us in the Family of Man, declares in the series of the Ten Commandments a whole catalogue of bonds that need to be protected and preserved.

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As an example, there's the family bond itself.....

> ...that the family might fulfill its purpose which God had in mind, God says, "This is necessary -- there must be respect for authority, there must be respect for parents, there must be respect for our elders - - "
> ...so in order to preserve society, God says: "Protect the family bond."

There is the blood bond in society....

> ...God has made of one blood all the people on the face of the earth. This blood is life-giving. God is the giver of life, God is the protector of life, God is the preserver of life -- God is the bestower of Life Eternal. Therefore God looks upon any life, anywhere, as something sacred.....and therefore He gives recognition of the blood bond, and He says, "You shall not spill this blood -- you shall not do murder -- you shall not kill."

In society there is the sex bond.....

> ...God is the creator of sex. And that it might serve its useful purpose, God wants it protected, God wants it handled wisely and well, God doesn't want it to be cheapened. So therefore, God in recognition of the bonds that hold society together, in reference to the sex bond, says, "You shall not commit adultery."

There is the property bond....

> ...each of us matures and develops according to the use of his possessions. You just can't divorce a man from the things that he calls his own. Even though the New Testament leads us to believe that we're not to become too attached to things....but God judges a man by what he does with things, how he looks upon the things that belong to another man. So God gives in the Commandments the property bond -- "You shall not steal."

There is also this bond that holds society together -- the language bond. Frail and fragile as words may be, they do hold us together. Let a man look into the eyes of a woman, and with all the ardor of his soul let him say to her, "I love you." Shall she not go back and cherish even the very sound of the words? Words are exceedingly precious things. When you read the New Testament, and the Gospel record particularly, and you meditate upon the life of Jesus Christ, you'll be impressed by the fact that when He came, He came as the worker of miracles. But don't forget this, that when

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He came, He came preaching. He used words, which remain unforgettable.

George Buttrick once was invited to deliver a commencement address in a mid-western town. He arrived in early afternoon. He had some time on his hands, so he went to the village library, then he thought he'd get himself out to the local high school auditorium, just to get the feel of the place. And as he got there in the afternoon, the graduating seniors were rehearsing their procession and their parts in the service. This made some impression upon him, the youthfulness of their lives, the sense of relief that they had arrived at a particular point.

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But then his eye was caught by the class motto that somebody had inscribed above the proscenium arch - - "DEEDS - NOT WORDS". Typical of youth, of course....."Who wants to talk? - let's get on with the thing - let's get the thing done." Buttrick took exception. He felt as though he wanted to stand up and shout -- "You're wrong when you put it this way! For words are deeds." They can become effective, and there are people whose lives have been changed, just by what they heard somebody say.....there are lives that have been destroyed, just by what they have heard somebody say.

Just to show you how terribly important words are, you may find it as a bit of surprise when I tell you now in this way and in this manner that all the hell that we've got to put up with here on this earth got started when somebody said something. The Biblical view of life, as we push it back as far as we can in the Old Testament, we come to that page that deals with the first family. There was Satan, who said something....he deliberately spoke an untruth -- the first black cloud on the horizon of life....and there were people who were foolish enough to believe it. If I remember my Greek

correctly, the word for Satan is Diabolos, and diabolos can also be translated as slanderer. The beginning of sin dealt with someone who slandered God, doubted his credibility, His integrity.....and a man and a woman were willing to believe the untruth.

I ought to say to you quite parenthetically now, isn't it established in courts that if a man is found passing a counterfeit coin, that he's held as liable as a counterfeiter himself? So the sin at the very beginning, not only the untruth being spoken, but those who are willing to believe it.

Do I have to tell you that once words are spoken, they just can't be recalled?.....

"Boys flying kites,
Haul in their white-winged birds;
But you can't do that
When you're flying words.

Thoughts unexpressed may sometimes
Fall back dead;
But even God can't kill them,
Once they're said."

St. Francis of Assissi used to tell how a woman came to him saying that she was guilty of telling tales that were not true. She gave reason for him to believe that she was truly remorseful. So after an act of confession, he assured her of God's forgiveness. But also being a keen student of human nature, he said to her - - "But this is not the end of the matter. This is what I suggest that you do: you get a goose, and you pluck feathers from the goose, and then you go around and you put a feather down at each house where you told an untruth, or where you told an untruth dealing with that family... ...and after you've made your round, then go back to the first house and begin to pick up the feathers that you've put down." It was quite impossible,

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you know, because by the time she went back to the first house, the wind had come along and blown the feathers away and they were irretrievable. So it is with the telling of a tale.

Now with what time that remains, let's see how we can apply to ourselves the truth of this Commandment, refresh our memories how we can violate it.

Well, first off, there's the giving of false witness in court. That's what God had in mind at the very beginning, that no one who is ever appearing in court was to give false witness, because justice is built upon truth, and justice becomes a mockery when people give the witness falsely. Well, most of us perhaps may not be hailed into court, and if we are hailed into court, we'll speak the truth, won't we? At least, we're led to believe that we ought to respect God's name enough that if we take the oath we'll speak the truth.

Well, the Commandment is also violated by slandering. And what is it to slander? - - it's to deliberately let loose an untruth, if not to fabricate it yourself. This is a diabolical thing, to institute a play upon words -- there are men whose lives have been ruined because someone has deliberately let loose an untruth....they have endeavored to go elsewhere and to begin life all over again; sometimes they achieve it, sometimes they don't.

And one of the regrettable things about human nature -- we're so stained by sin that there are many people who will believe anything, as long as it's whispered. The highwayman may attack a man and take away his silver and gold... ..this he may be able to replace and continue his course in life. The assassin may kill his man instantaneously -- death is final. But the slanderer, once he has done his devilish deed, sets loose the trend of a lie that may hold a man until he dies.....and this is one reason why every now and then there are those

who commit suicide -- just because they don't have the strength to begin all over again in the face of a slanderer's evil deed.

There are those who violate this Commandment by tale-bearing. They deliberately pass it on...they never stop to question it. They just pass it on. "Thou shalt not bear false witness" -- God holds us responsible for what we say to somebody else, and if we're pedlars of the untruth, God requires that we find out whether we speak the truth or not, even though it's being passed on.

There are those who violate this Commandment by allowing themselves, to, through a period of time, to nurse a wound that may have been innocently inflicted. Whether they do it consciously or not, they keep alive in their hearts an untruth, and they never make it their business to find out if the thing is true or false. In southwestern Pennsylvania there's a beloved pastor who has been there in that congregation for some sixteen years...and he told me that when he first went to that parish, he went visiting in the homes of certain people, and when he was in this one particular home he happened to say something quite innocently, that she believed that he had done deliberately, to embarrass her and to humiliate her. She nursed this thing for more than a decade, and she built up the wall, so that he could never fully be the pastor to that woman that she ought to have had. Then one night, before a Communion service, she call him and made the confession.....and all of this was news to him! But what hell she endured for more than a decade -- and presumably enjoyed it!

One violates this Commandment also by asking a question adroitly, by the accent in the voice, by the implication that's given -- not directly setting

loose an untruth, but raising a doubt! And of all the sins committed by people in their interpersonal relationship, after more than a quarter of a century in the ministry, I frankly admit that this can be the one that irritates most and does more harm and danger -- within any circle -- just the way the question is put, just the way the accent is given.

One also violates this Commandment by remaining silent. Three people are present.....one says something....another believes it....and the third man knows it to be untrue, and never so much as raises his voice. One can violate the Commandment in this way.

One violates the Commandment also by the imputation of another's motives. You want a very simple illustration - - someone out of the goodness of his heart and out of pure generosity makes a gracious gift. Somebody says "What's his angle?" Among people, I say to you, is there greater sin than this, to suspect evil where there is only good?

If you are tempted to reveal a tale to you someone has told about another, make it pass, before you speak, three gates of gold, these narrow gates: first, is it true? Then, is it needed? In your mind give truthful answers. But the next is the last and the narrowest -- is it kind?.....

> "And if to reach your lips at last
> It passes through these gate-ways three,
> Then you may tell the tale, nor fear
> What the result of speech may be."

Now one final word. When you break this Commandment, and you tell a <u>lie</u>, it's never a single accommodation, x for there is no such thing as <u>a</u> lie; there are only <u>lies</u>. Because once you've told a lie, you invariably have to tell another lie to cover it up. So by God's grace, stop it. Beloved, words are precious. By them we receive the assurance that we're being saved. Use them wisely and well...to help, not to hurt.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Quinquagesima Sunday February 25, 1968

"TO BE SATISFIED" (Exodus 20:17)
(Sermon IX: The Ten Commandments)

If there are sermons in blades of grass, sermons may also be found in tablets of bronze as they appear upon the facade of a county courthouse. At least, that's the way this preacher felt again as he traveled through Gettysburg on Thursday and looked once more upon the Adams County Courthouse structure. There, almost uniquely enough, one finds the Ten Commandments.

So the preacher reasons with himself, and he says, Do you suppose there were people who ever took issue with this? There are, as you know, all kinds of people in the world, and people wishing, willing, to protest, at the mention of anyone's name, at the sight of any person. So undoubtedly there are those who said, "This is not right -- the State has no business to turn the facade of a courthouse into a pulpit."

And maybe he could build a case, and surely there is no law anywhere that could be invoked that a man, here in the United States of America, must be a believer in God....."I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt have no other gods before me".....so proclaims the First Commandment, and it's not been omitted from the tablet that appears on the courthouse wall.

He might equally build a case when it comes to the Tenth Commandment: "Thou shalt not covet" - - for no man can be hailed into court just because he was walking down the street and cast a covetous eye upon a continental.

...a man can be brought into court if he's incorrigible -- if a youngster does not obey, if his parents can't handle him -- we have such a thing as juvenile court. So it's right and proper that perhaps

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the county courthouse should list: a man, a child, should honor his parents, their elders, and those in authority....

...a man can be hailed into court because he's committed thievery....

....because he's spoken in slanderous fashion, because he's committed adultery, because he's committed murder...

....but you can't hail a man into court because he's coveted. Yet God, who is the supreme Judge, when He laid down the law, and before whom all of us one day must appear, saw fit to write into His tablet:

"Thou shalt not covet."

It's this Commandment that concerns our attention today as we bring this series to a close.

But one reacts strangely to this Commandment. Because he also remembers that in the New Testament the Apostle Paul did say something about a man ought to covet. Even though on another page of the same Letter that he may have written, he says a man should not covet. Well now, what gives? Is coveting wrong?

The Epistle Lesson that was read for this day -- Paul's magnificent paeon of praise for the way of love -- nothing has ever been written that surpasses it. And significantly enough, when that passage in the Bible is introduced, there's the closing verse of the 12th chapter of that First Letter to the Corinthians, in which Paul is really saying, "Now I'm going to give you something to really covet" - - - "set for yourself as the object of your desire the way of love"...."covet earnestly the best gifts" he also says.

He also says as he writes to the Philippians, laying down a whole catalogue of great and wonderful ideals....."Think on these things." Yet one quickly says, the Commandment has it, "You shall not covet."

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For our purpose this morning we might translate that word 'covet' very easily.....it meant to set your heart upon -- eagerly -- it means to desire.....and if you want a strong way to put it, it means to lust after. It means to know that you will not experience a delight until you actually possess.

When you study this Commandment, go back and look at it in the original, figuratively speaking:

'Thou shalt not covet - - - "

....and then you begin to deal with something that always has an apostrophe and s - - you and I are not to covet what belongs to somebody else. But on the other hand, if we read the pages of the New Testament, we are to covet, anything and everything, that might make us a better person, and a better steward of the things we possess.

Any reader of history may come to the conclusion that the Family of Man has never mastered the art of living together harmoniously. From the dawn of history there has always been struggle, and it could be that the greatest of all struggles known to man is the struggle between two segments of society, always the line seems to be drawn.....the struggle between the "haves" and the "have nots"....

.....it can be written largely, boldly, when you think of the whole family of mankind on the international scene.....it can be written minutely when you think of a small segment of society, within the closely confined relationship of two people, where a line can be drawn where the one has, and the other doesn't.

Can you picture Abraham Lincoln walking down the street, tall, gaunt figure, with two of his sons hanging on to either hand....and as he walks

they're sobbing their hearts out. A man sees what's happening, and says, "Mr. Lincoln, what's wrong?"

Mr. Lincoln replies, as the story goes, "I have a problem on my hand. And come to think of it, my problem is the problem of the world."

The man says, "What's the problem, Mr. Lincoln?"

Mr. Lincoln says, "In my pocket I have three walnuts...and each of my boys wants two." .....the problem of the world.

Well sit back a bit harder for the moment - - the walnuts happen to have been the father's. They belong to him. Each of the youngsters wants two - - each wants more than the other is likely to get.....our basic problem: to <u>have</u>, and to <u>have not</u>.

They say it's as significant as any conference that the Board of World Missions has called in recent years - - perhaps the most significant conference of our generation, someone expansively said. It took place the first week in January at a conference center in Philadelphia. They called together some forty people, representing the leadership of our expression of the Cause of Christ in many parts of the world. The conference was called hopefully that this group might be able to isolate the issues, on the world scene, to which the Christian Gospel as we express it will have to speak.

I can't remember whether it was the second of the three days or just when it was, but one man stood up and said, "I hope that there's one thing remains crystal clear for all of us: that our basic problem is going to be the problem of the "haves" and the "have nots". This we cannot ignore. No matter how we look at it, it's going to be drawn this way eventually."

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I can't explain to you the nature of man, but it seems to be true, doesn't it, that there's always someone who happens to have more than somebody else. Now God addresses Himself to this problem from the very beginning, and He says, "Do not covet." - - "Do not set your affection upon what isn't yours, because in so doing you're going to get yourselves into all kinds of trouble." This is the Commandment that goes down deep and penetrates into a man's heart. And out of a man's heart come the issues of life, and action. A man looking at another man's wife, furtively and flirtatiously, a man who can't keep his eyes off of another man's wife... ...this kind of thing frequently ends in an adulterous relationship.....

.....a man who doesn't go to sleep at night because he's completely obsessed by the fact that his neighbor down the street happens to have a larger portfolio of stock -- may end up a murderer or a thief, or a nervous wreck....

What, then, does God want us to do with what we think we must have? You remember in one of these sermons we said that you can't divorce a man's character from his possessions. You and I become according to the way we handle things, and we handle things according to the kind of person we are. After wrestling this past summer, as I told you some weeks earlier, with the problem which is suburbia, I'm convinced that our greatest problem as Christians is the curse that comes upon us in our middle-classness, or whatever other aspect that you might call which comes to us in our affluent society.....this desire to achieve, this desire to arrive, this desire to have a good portion of the world's goods.

Now when this becomes the dominating influence in a man's life! Was

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it Martin Luther who told us that anything upon which a man sets his affection as the driving force in his life, this thing becomes his god. Now can you see why God, even in the giving of the Ten Commandments, begins the series where He began? - - the First Commandment: "Thou shalt have no other gods -- I am the Lord your God" ...and the last Commandment: "You shall not covet", because when you covet a thing, it can become your god.

With a sanctified imagination, think of it this way, won't you? ...Jesus, the carpenter's son....one day the rich man comes in. He's gained a great portion of this world's goods, and he's made up his mind he's going to hold on to it. So he brings his order list. he's going to build a much bigger barn -- so many window frames, so many door-sills, so many rafters. And Jesus, eager-eyed, observes all of it. The next morning the man's son comes to the carpenter's shop and says to Joseph, "Cancel the order. Dad died last night." ....who knows but what out of this kind of an experience Jesus told the parable, the theme of which was "Do not covet -- do not set your affection too strongly upon the things of this world."

On the other hand, a man ought to covet if in coveting he improves his character and learns how to use what he's been given. "Covet earnestly the best gifts" -- the Christian Gospel addresses itself to those who have. If you have, then there's only one way for a Christian to use what he has, and that is to bring a blessing to somebody else. If you have, God allows you to have what you have, that others may be blessed.

Listen carefully now, and hear it to its conclusion. Two men were walking down the street. Their eyes fell upon a perfectly beautiful automobile, the last word in mechanical construction as far as an automobile is

concerned. And the one man said to the other, "It belongs to So-and-So — his brother gave it to him." And the other man replied, "I wish I could be a brother like that." Covet for yourself, my friend, the opportunity and the possibility of making possible for those who have not what by the grace of God you enjoy.

It's not easy to keep the Commandments. We're stained by original sin. Small wonder, then, in the Episcopal Prayer Book, there's this response after the reading of each Commandment:

"Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline
our hearts to keep this Law."

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Invocabit. The First Sunday in Lent March 3, 1968

"KEY WORDS OF LENT: TEMPTATION"
(Matthew 4:1)

Whether you've caught it or not, it's stated quite clearly in the hymn that you've just sung. In the closing part of each of the stanzas, the theme for Lent is clearly established...

" . . learn of Jesus Christ to pray - "

" . . learn of him to bear the cross - "

" . . learn of Jesus Christ to die - "

" . . learn how to arise - - "

In the calendar of the Church there is the Lenten season, and if Lent serves any purpose at all, it's primarily to call to our attention Jesus Christ, that our minds might be renewed and refreshed by the example of His sacrificial life and death.

Not everyone can put his finger to his lips reverently, and when he whispers the name Jesus Christ, call Him, as the Creeds put it majestically, "Very God of very God" - - - not everyone might be able to do that. Not everyone might be able to see in Jesus Christ all that God reveals of Himself, in this one man. But it is given to everyone beholding Jesus Christ to discover an example that's set before him. And if you can't begin anywhere else in your relationship with Jesus Christ, then this is the point at which you ought to begin, that you see Him as one set before us, as an example, that the tremendous truth remains that there was that moment in history when God breaks through, and God raises up in front of us Jesus of Nazareth, to the end that one day He himself could say, "I have given you an example."

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Now a man ought not to end at this point in his understanding of Jesus Christ, because he's always more than just example. But this precisely is the point at which any man, every man, could begin. Was not this His understanding of it also, that when He was here on earth He came looking for disciples, and He simply said, "Follow me" - - - "Come after me" - - "Let my path be set before you."

Now when we come to this, the first Sunday in Lent, we have established in front of us the example of Jesus Christ being tempted. And immediately you may say to yourself, Jesus Christ being tempted! Some people reject the notion. They reject the notion for this reason if for no other reason, that the Scripture says "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." - - Jesus being led into the place of temptation by God's Spirit?

Well part of our trouble lies, you see, in what we understand by that word temptation. It's commonly interpreted in two different ways.

Some people understand that to be tempted is to be seduced. Some people understand that when the tempter comes your way, he has only one objective in mind, and that is that you might capitulate to evil. So there's this understanding of temptation -- it's never completely devoid of the element of seduction. God's Spirit the seducer? Never.

But the Christian reading of life, and the Christian understanding of that word temptation, as God has unfolded in the experience himself, is never seduction, but rather testing. Every experience of temptation is a testing period. That grand and noble soul of God, our Old Testament professor at seminary, Dr. Herbert Christian Alleman, who when he retired from Gettysburg came

Washington way, and for a short period of his life was a member of this congregation.....some of us students remember how he wrestled with us as we dealt with this word temptation. Hebrew scholar that he was, he reminded us that there is a word in Hebrew that means that to be tempted is to be tested. And I can still see those noble hands of his in an act of demonstration, telling us how the old Arab would take the skins that he had prepared, and as he would think of putting them to the use that he had in mind, he would first take them in his hands, and then take that skin, and stretch it....and then he said there's a word in Hebrew that means stretch, that means test. The Arab would stretch, not that he wanted to tear the skin, not that he wanted to destroy it, but he simply wanted to see how much it could withstand.

In a certain sense, that's what temptation is, to see how much a man's soul can withstand. We ought to thank God that we live in a kind of a world where temptation becomes our lot in life. We become stronger according to the tests that we have to encounter. I wouldn't want to have a single appliance brought into our home if I couldn't have the assurance that there was such a thing as an Underwriters Laboratory, that I couldn't have the assurance that somewhere, somehow, this thing had undergone a period of testing. ....I wouldn't want to emplane -- never get on a craft that soars into the heaven, if I couldn't be assured that the aviation industry guarantees such things as test pilots, and test after test that is given to one part after another in the aircraft itself.

God had a noble dream in His mind for Jesus Christ -- His unique plan for the salvation of men. Will you let me put it for you this way: before it could be fully launched, before it could be given to men as a guaranteed

way, there was the time of testing....."Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" - - - before He preached His first sermon! - - - before He performed His first miracle! - - - before He named His first recruit.....He was tested. We shan't take time this morning to talk about the nature and the character of the temptation experience ....it's enough to know that He was put to the test.

Jon and I were talking last night. I hope I can remember the thing correctly - - Jon was telling me about something that he had seen, either a television short or in a magazine that he had read, I've quite forgotten now..... but someone very cleverly had taken the precious message of the Christian Gospel and designed it to get some kind of response from the 'hippie' world.

Two hippies are reacting to this treasured verse of Scripture, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him might not perish but have everlasting life."

The one reaction of the hippie is this, "Man, that's hip! Man, that's really cool! God so loved".....and then the voice comes through, that the hippie might hear it, the voice from beyond: "Yes, and two thousand years ago there was somebody on this earth who believed it and practiced it"..... ...and the other hippie reacts: "What a pity -- he never seemed to have gotten very far!"

But our reply to that is, He did get far. He got all the way to the end. If you want to understand it in this manner, that one solitary life proved for all time and for all men everywhere, as He was put to the test, that God's way can be practiced, that God's way can be lived, here, in this wicked world. So if you can't see it any other way, my friend, look at it this way, that God-

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in-Christ is set before us as the example, an example that's been tested and proven. It does work. It worked for Him.

You're not forgetting, are you, that you and I would never know anything about this temptation experience if Jesus himself hadn't told it to us? Temptation is that personal.

And the second obaervation that comes very quickly is this: that the experience of temptation is something that takes place in the arena of a man's heart -- it's soul struggle, that's what it is. I used to be troubled by the fact that while the main episodes in the life of Jesus Christ have been pictured for us, even as the stained glass windows in the main section of the Nave tell us the story of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ....

...you begin here with the pictorial presentation in the Temple...the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, the Ascension.....

...but I've never seen an artist's interpretation of the Temptation.

Maybe you and I can never have pictured for us, in human terms, what happened when a man undergoes temptation. Maybe the devil doesn't have a face, or maybe the devil has many faces. As the force of evil, he picks up this face for this occasion, and he picks up that face for another occasion. In that sense he has a face. Maybe we can understand it this way, that in Jesus' account of what happened, as it's recorded for us here in the 4th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, you have poetic imagery, the telling of something parabolic, of a moral struggle that took place within His soul.

Now having said that, you and I ought to be very careful as we go through life, because we never quite know what's happening down deep inside a man's soul. You just can't tell by looking at a man what the nature and the character of his temptation experience is. But the one thing that you can be certain

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of -- no man escapes it. We're all subject to temptation.

Now going back to this account....there are several other things that need to be said here.

The devil left Jesus. And there's an old translation that says "left him for a season." That isn't good news either, is it? It's another way of saying that you and I remain on the devil's calling list until the very day that we die. We never reach a point in life where we fully arrive -- we never reach a point where we're beyond the devil's grasp....."The devil left him for a season."

There are those who understand the life of Jesus Christ as one continuous round of struggle and temptation. He was tested by the disciples, He was tested by church leaders.....even there in the Garden of Gethsemane, the possibility of there being some other way.....and this is what temptation always is! -- the inclination to consider some other way, upon which God himself cannot smile.

Then the Scripture also says, in this temptation experience, that "angels came and ministered to him." God stands ready, willing and able to help. There's never a temptation experience that you and I encounter without God standing by, ready to throw in all the force of His power to help. If I had my life to begin over again, as a father, I would reserve for myself certain moments when I would sit down with our two sons, and as best I could I would lay before them the fact that as long as they live they'll be subject to testing, to temptation. There will always be the choice of one of two ways: from the Christian orientation, the way that merits the approval of God -- the way that wins the smile of the Evil One.

I love my parents dearly; to the day that I die I'll remain indebted to

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them, for more than I could ever repay. But I wish that somewhere along the line it had been spelled out clearly for me -- it was quite a shock when I learned it myself for the first time. Any reading of life, it seems to me, includes the fact of temptation....testing.....struggle.

Let me say one more thing before we conclude. The Christian reading of life: that any man, with God's help, can rise above temptation. The other side of the coin is also this: that any man, by himself and by himself alone, is never strong enough either to face it, or to invite it.....and all too often this is our greater sin.....

"The perils that we well might shun
We saunter forth to meet:
The path into the road of sin
We tread with careless feet - - -
And when our hands should bar the gate
We parley with the foe.

The ill we dream we ne'er could do
In thought we dramatize; - - "

....you know, this is one reason why I'm always frightened by sophisticated movies....I'm always disturbed by books that are reserved only for the intellectual -- as though they had a kind of immunity that other people don't have. There are some things that a man ought not to read, there are some things that a man can't afford to look at.....

"The ill we dream we ne'er could do
In thought we dramatize;
What we should loathe, we learn to scan
With speculative eyes.
Alas! for ignorance profound
Of our poor nature's bent!
The wakened sympathy with wrong
Becomes the will's consent.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Prayer offered by Pastor Shaheen - March 3, 1968

IN THIS moment before Thee, O God, out of all that you've given to us we return unto Thee a portion. Wilt Thou bless what we bring. Have mercy upon us that we have not brought Thee more. Teach us, in our unwisdom, how to use aright what we continue to retain.

O GOD, so we pray for our lives, that we may effectively witness for Thee, in the circle of which we are part, at home, where we work, on the street where we live; that we, O God, may have a continuing concern for Thy Kingdom, that there may swell up within us a desire to see the needs of people met, where we live, within our own circle, beyond our circle.

O GOD, hear the prayers of these Thy children as they wait before Thee now. Let none go his way without a blessing be vouchsafed. May each feel upon him Your claim, and what is more, Your empowering grace.

HEAR our prayer, O God, for those whom we love, wherever they may be. Hear our prayer for those who are scattered all over the world. Hear our prayer for the sons and daughters of this congregation who serve under colors. Hasten the day when peace will be established. To that end we offer ourselves before Thee, praying for the gift from on high without which we ourselves cannot make decisions affecting the welfare of all mankind.

OUR FATHER.....

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Second Sunday in Lent March 10, 1968

"KEY WORDS OF LENT: FAITH"
(Matthew 15:28)

With whatever equipment you have as you journey through life, whether the equipment is the original or the acquired, don't be overly distraught if you can't find a panic-button, because when God made us, we have reason to believe that He never intended that we might have need of a panic-button. One of the first lessons in life that most of us have to master is that there really shouldn't be a panic-button -- that God who made us instilled in us the capability by which we could respond to Him, fervently hoping that in our time of need there would always be a way of deliverance.

I can't remember now (maybe she never told it) -- whether she was seven years of age at the time, or ten.....but it all came out in one of the retreat sessions that we had at Bethany. She was a farmer's daughter. She told that as a child she was running around in the fields, and she fell into an abandoned well. She was overwhelmed by the darkness that surrounded her, and then she had to deal with the fact that her cries for help were going unheeded. Even at her tender age, whatever it was, she was old enough to have the thing make a lasting impression.....and she was old enough to realize, as she admitted later on, that she was just too young to die! She'd go on believing that somehow she would be delivered -- that's the way she put it at thirty-eight years of age -- really meaning that somehow she was going to be rescued.

She showed marked signs of maturity, for this is a true reading of life, that no matter how we might be overwhelmed, life itself provides a way of re-

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lease, escape. And if we're worthy of the name Christian, we ought to be the kind of person who honestly believes that God is able, if not to see us out, then to see us through our dilemma. We have a word for it -- we call it faith.....faith to believe that God is able, faith to believe that God is willing -- if not to see us out, then to see us all the way through.

These Sunday mornings during Lent we're dealing with the key words of Lent. Last Sunday the key word was Temptation. Today the key word is faith. When you and I read a book, there's always the inclination to read the beginning and then to pass over what lies in between and go to see how the story ends. It's not always a good thing to do, because we must learn to appreciate what it is that makes the story end the way the story ends. The conclusion in itself is never enough. It's always what lies in between -- it's this whole business of "in the meantime" that spells out the meaning for life itself. This is why the Christian Church very wisely sets aside the season called Lent, because as Christians we are people of the Easter Faith. We know how the story ends in advance, we've been told it so often. But what we need to remind ourselves is that before the story ends the way it did, there was the tedious, tortuous trail that Jesus Christ has to endure.....and we too must learn from Him what it is to endure the "in the meantime."

For life must be seen for what it is -- unpleasantly, it's an obstacle course. In the Gospel lesson for the Day -- let's deal with the facts -- our Blessed Lord was traveling a certain way, and then He comes to some so-called 'alien' territory, and a woman comes out to meet Him. She was not Jewish. She had not been reared and trained in His tradition -- she was an outsider. But for one reason or another, she has heard about Jesus Christ, and when He comes her way, she cries out and says, "Lord, help me! -- my daughter is demon-possessed!"

The rest of the "in the meantime" is not very pleasant reading. As an example, when she came to Jesus she was discouraged, discouraged by the impatience and almost ruthless behavior of the disciples. Let me say to you quite parenthethically, God himself may be the only one who knows how many people there are who have never been quite won to the Kingdom, because of us! We're quite secure in our circle, and there's a kind of person who wants to keep Jesus Christ all to himself, and unless you happen to come to Jesus Christ the way this person did, they're not so certain that they're going to allow Him to give a blessing to an outsider.

So this woman, an outsider, came....and her first obstacle: the reaction of the friends of Jesus Christ. The disciples looked upon her only as a pest... ..."Get rid of her -- she's bothering us." This unfortunately has been the inclination of a number of believers down through the history of the Church: "Get rid of them -- they bother us -- they're not our kind." Life is an obstacle course, even when you might be headed toward the Family of God.

Then equally difficult to appreciate is the fact that she encountered an obstacle in Jesus Christ. Any cursory reading of the passage will allow you to believe that. For when she came to Jesus He didn't say to her: "What can I do for you this morning?"....and as you and I are so often wont to picture Jesus Christ with arms outstretched -- "Come unto me...I have a blessing for you....why don't you ask me for it?".....not so this time. This uninvited woman comes to Him, pleads her case, and in the first blush He's cutting her down to size. What an obstacle course she had to run!

Yet I say to you, it's still a true reading of life because for some of us, we can admit that we've had our moments with God as we even say that He seems to forget how to be gracious! But this woman, mark you, she kept hold-

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ing on! She refused to believe that there was any alternative....a determined soul. Life had to deal graciously with her. It just had to be that somewhere in the wicked world of ours there was one good person who would grant her a blessing. So she kept pleading, "Lord, help me."

Now you can come to the end of the story. Now that you have traveled this tortuous, tedious trail, now you can fix your eyes upon the finish, the concluding verse.....

"O woman, be it unto thee as thou wilt - -

O woman, great is thy faith . . . "

You know, He didn't say that every day. You know, He didn't say it very often at all. He had to spend so much of His time trying to engender faith, and here was faith fully fashioned for Him.

That's what faith is -- a very free translation, an almost reckless understanding of it is this: a willingness to believe.....that if you can only hold on long enough, God has the answer, if not to see you out of a thing, then most assuredly to see you through it.

During Lent we concentrate upon the sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ. The Church very wisely says, during Lent concentrate on the "in the meantime" -- that tortuous, tedious trail on the way to Jerusalem.....so that if you were to come into this place as we've invited other people to do on occasion, to scan these stained glass windows that tell the life of Jesus Christ, don't you dare just come and begin with the Nativity, and then take a short-cut, instead of going all the way around the Nave -- don't you take the short-cut, look at the Nativity and then go over there and look at the Ascension and say, "That's the way it ends...that's all there is to it".....but in the meantime you go from window to window dealing with faith, pilgrimage.

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Ah, I think the Roman Catholic Church has something....when the penitent comes, when he makes confession, when he's given absolution -- the priest should offer a kind of spiritual prescription and say, "Now that you've received the assurance that you're forgiven, as you do penance, do the Stations of the Cross....concentrate step after step on the journey that Jesus Christ had to make." It's never enough to say He went to Jerusalem - - it's never enough to say He went beyond Jerusalem and ascended into heaven. It's also necessary to mark the steps of the journey which He took in faith, believing that no matter how great the obstacle would be, God would always see Him through.

I've never attempted to deny the affection in my heart that I find overwhelming when I think of that man, Ellwood DeLong. He came to us in the sunset years of his life. We first got to know him when he was eighty years of age. He designed the Chapel of the Grateful Heart...his touch is here in so many places. When he ended his earthly pilgrimage I was given the great honor to say the last words as we lowered his body into the grave. I recalled how so often he sat in my office here at the church, and he would say, "Raymond, I want to tell you something - - "

> ...and as it's true of age, I found him repeating himself, but always majestically, always eloquently. He wanted to impress upon me, whether he knew he was doing it or not, that years ago he had established for himself that life was never to have been lived just 'somehow.'

Somewhere in my files I have the motto of his life: "Live, not somehow, but triumphantly." While his body wasted away, when I brought him a pastoral ministry in his emaciated form, the spirit of the man, reflecting the spirit of

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God, breathed triumph. This is what faith is -- to believe that God always has the last word, and God's last word is always good.

I don't know what your problems may be in life, but I know one thing --if you've lived at all, you have problems. If there's any kind of depth to your life, you've had something of a tortuous trail. If in moments of reflection you see something of futility, and your life is characterized by frustrations, and you can even count your failures....then with all the ardor of my soul, let me remind you that you can well afford to hold on, believing that God, if He doesn't have a way out, He has a way through.

One of the things that characterizes our generation is almost the element of hopelessness. Everything becomes a crisis situation these days, and we're overwhelmed by the magnitude of any problem. Maybe we've got to push ourselves back to the elemental of the Christian faith, and that is honestly to believe that no matter how great the problem may be, God has a way through, if not out, of the dilemma.

As I was preaching this sermon at 8:30 particularly, I scanned the congregation. And I think if I were the kind of preacher who would have taken the liberty, I would have motioned to this person, to that person, and a small company would have surrounded me in the pulpit, and I would have said to the rest of the congregation....."On the basis of what I know, having listened in on human hearts in this congregation for a dozen years, you people constitute Exhibit A - - your own life is an eloquent testimony of holding on to God's providence -- your own life is an exhibit of throwing yourself completely at the mercy of God, believing that in your despair He could see you through."

Of the merchant adventurers of Queen Elizabeth's day, these inspired words

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were once written: "They dared beyond their strength, hazarded against their judgment and in extremities were of excellent hope." This I think is the kind of thing that the saints in heaven would shout back to us, for who are the saints except the ones who have persevered with patience the course which they had to run? They met obstacle after obstacle, and if we could hear them shouting back to us from heaven, they'd say, "Hold on...don't give up!... it's worth it!"

You remember when we were youngsters we were told by our teachers in the elementary grades that we ought to discover Robert Louis Stevenson. One of the books we read, one of the stories -- "Kidnapped". Remember? David Balfour stranded on this uninhabited island....the nights and the days are long. He goes hoping that some day somebody will come to get him off the island. He's at the complete mercy of something over and above himself, and the last straw seems to have it, when a group in a boat come sailing by, and they see him stranded there, and they laugh at him and they taunt him.....and then they go merrily sailing on their way, to leave him there. It's only some days later, at low tide, that he discovers that there is a way of passage from his island to the mainland. This is what you and I have to remind ourselves.

But you know, the strangest thing is that for some people in this whole matter of faith, they sometimes think only of their understanding of the nature and character of God. We teach them that God is able to deliver them, but now going back to a spiritual interpretation of the truth -- they never get delivered because they never know that they need to be rescued. There are many people who never get a physician's cure because they refuse to believe that they are sick. Any pastor who has done any kind of counselling finds his heart torn as he ministers to people who go on denying themselves the blessing that only faith

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can give.....because they are either indifferent or ignorant to the need which they have.

This whole story of that Syro-Phoenician woman ends triumphantly, not just because Jesus Christ was standing by, about to offer the help at the propitious moment that he saw fit. But the story is written largely because the way it began.....a woman came and said to him:

"help me, Lord.....help me!"

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Oculi. The Third Sunday in Lent March 17, 1968

"KEY WORDS OF LENT: OBEDIENCE"
(Luke 11:28)

It was one of those days - - comforting, isn't it, to know that our Blessed Lord had them too.....a group of rather obstreperous folk had come and were allowing themselves a measure of delight as they put Him on the spot. Surely He got no pleasure out of it, but He did wax argumentative, knowing full well, of course He did, that very few if any people find God at the end of an argument. Still as of old, "A man convinced against his will, may be of the same opinion still."

The issues were clearly drawn. They refused to believe in Him, and they became partners in the worst of all evils, there is no greater sin than this: than to wilfully brand what is good as evil. The sum and substance is simply that Jesus Christ was standing in their midst, and they called Him the Devil, the tool of the Devil -- He was in league with the Devil.

After the argument went on for a while, He presumably had put them in their place -- whether they would admit it or not is another story. Then there must have been a silence, silence that was broken only by, shall we call her, a little old lady, who stood up and rather boldly and bravely said something absolutely magnificent. Using a good Oriental picture of speech, she said, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that you sucked"....as much as to say, "Oh, to have given birth to a son like you! - - oh, to be a mother who could claim someone like you!".....a magnificent thing for her to have said.

And surely it must have warmed the ears of Jesus Christ, because from our own human point of view, can't we say that there must come times when God, en-

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encouraged by the good things that we say about Him. It's not that He was ungracious, and surely not that He was unappreciative, but He immediately said to her, after she had spoken so beautifully:

"Yea, rather blessed are the ones who hear
the word of God and keep it"

...as much as to say, "Thanks for your praise, kind one, but praise is never enough."

Oh, of course there is a time when the word needs to be spoken, lest in our silence we give comfort to the enemy. It's never enough to say, "Deeds, not words." Words too are important. Jesus Christ himself is Exhibit A for this. Does not the Scriptural record say that Jesus Christ came preaching.....and as you read the New Testament account in the Gospel record, how much of His time was spent just in talking! And so effective was His speech that many a person undoubtedly, after hearing Him speak, put his finger to his lips and whispered the name GOD with all the reverence that becomes it.

Words are important. But words without deeds are not pleasing in God's sight. It's words and deeds. There's a town in Pennsylvania -- I could take you there -- where for more than forty years, every Christmas Eve a business man in that community went up on the hill and delivered his first Christmas present to the same man....where year after year, for more than forty years, he would do this. It so happened that when the business man was about to launch his enterprise, there were any number of people who discouraged it, even ridiculed and scorned him. But one man spoke a word of encouragement, and told him that he honestly believed that he had a future, he ought to try it. The man not only spoke the word of encouragement, but he went out and he got the business man his

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first customer. The business man never forgot. Year after year, the first Christmas present that he delivered was to the man on the hill who at a critical time in his life did not remain silent, but spoke the encouraging word.... ...and backed up the word that he had spoken by his performance.

When our Blessed Lord was here on earth, He was always speaking the good word. But His ministry was not simply a ministry of words. Now we're in the Lenten season. And what does Lent do if it doesn't do this: call to our remembrance the life of Jesus Christ sacrificially offered. Of course we remember what He said, but we remember what He said only because we remember what He did....

> ...what is Gethsemane but Jesus Christ going into the testing arena, and there allowing the battle to be won by letting it be known, once and forever, that He would be the Heavenly Father's obedient Son - - "Not as I will, but as You will . . "
>
> ...what is Calvary, but the dramatization of all that He said ...its truth spelled out on a cross, its compassion, its sacrifice, its perfect love, spoken in unmistakable terms.

What do we do during the Lenten season? You helped do it, my friend - - we sang, upon the reading of the Epistle: "Christ hath humbled himself, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Obedience is what God is always demanding from us. When He came He looked for followers -- people who would come after and obey. When He said to this kind and gracious old lady, when she spoke so extravagantly - - "yea, rather blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it" - - He was simply saying, Praise is never enough....profession is never enough - - it has to be backed up by performance.

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There are some people, you know, who think they've done a day's work for the Lord just because they've said something kind about Him. You're not unmindful of it, are you, but you and I run a risk every time we come to church on a Sunday morning.....

> ...here we come...we're gathered together....we sing God's praise....we stand on our feet and use wonderful words....we offer our prayers.....

...but be careful, my friend, lest you run the risk of becoming the kind of person who thinks that just because he's come and spent this hour here, that he's done a whole week's work for the Lord - - as though this is all there is to it.

There's no question in my mind but what you do bear witness to the very fact that you came here today. Your friends and neighbors undoubtedly know by this time that you are church go-ers, without your saying a single word -- they might have taken note of the fact that you follow a particular pattern on a Sunday, and they might discover that this is where you've come and where you've been. This is important.

But in the final analysis, the world on the outside will not judge us by the fact that we've sung God's praise, but they'll judge us by what we've done, by the kind of lives that we live, day in and day out.

Was it Mahatma Gandhi, or was it Rajah Krishna, the President of India, who when somebody came quite enthusiastically and tried to convince him that he ought to become a Christian, spoke the indicting word when he said - - "- and what can your religion do for me that it hasn't done for you?" ....as much as to say, "I'm not at all impressed by your performance."

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When Dr. Carlson and I were in India we found this to be true, that quite often a great deal of the preaching took place outside of the church. You were a kind of itinerant...and then the Christians in the community might gather around you when you stood up in the market-place or on the street...and a strange thing happened -- any number of people who were not Christian would also gather around. The Christians sat down in a little circle, the non-Christians stood on the periphery. Bishop Neal, an Anglican, said that he had discovered that no matter how fervently the Christians sang, no matter how earnestly they prayed, and no matter how truthfully the sermon was delivered, he knew very well that all of those non-Christians standing up on the edge of the circle were saying to themselves...."Well, we know how they live, we know how they treat their neighbors, we know how they treat the other members of their family, we know how they conduct their business affairs."

Still as of old, profession must be backed up with practice and performance. Creed essentially is judged by conduct. There was the man who said that he remembered his mother telling him about the little lady who went to church. She belonged to a congregation where the custom was that every time the offering was brought to the altar, the congregation stood up and sang, sang the words of a hymn: "Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold" ....and lo and behold, she sang the greater part of the hymn, but when it came to those words, her lips were tightly shut. She was basically a very honest woman. She knew how little she gave to the Lord. She knew what her stewardship practice was. That in itself was bad enough, and she wasn't going to compound it by making a liar out of herself. What we say is never enough. It must be backed up by a measure of obedience.

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You know, quite honestly now, I think this is why some people have lost their enthusiasm to sing old so-called "Gospel hymns" -- not, maybe, because we've become so sophisticated and we say the tunes aren't very good...but maybe we've seen through the words that we sang and the shallow performance that followed. In that small town where I went to Sunday School, didn't we used to sing, "You bring the one next to you, and I'll bring the one next to me; in all kinds of weather, we'll all stand together, and see what can be done!" -- how fervently we sang. But the attendance board next Sunday was pretty much the same as it was the Sunday before....

...we used to sing, "I'll go where you want me to go, Dear Lord; I'll say what you want me to say, Dear Lord; I'll be what you want me to be, Dear Lord" ....still as of old, God not only listens, He also <u>looks</u>.

Now what would you say is religion's greatest danger? What did you say it is? Materialism? Secularism? Atheism? Irreligion? If you have the Good Book in your hand, you'll know that none of these is the answer. According to the Good Book, religion's greatest danger lies in a kind of well-intentioned sentimentality, where you and I are turned on and all caught up, and level off at that point. The greatest danger lies in profession without practice, emotion without action.

Perhaps the word of the old Negro preacher speaks to our condition. Somebody asked him one time what "Amen" meant. (There was always the flourish throughout the congregation -- "Amen, brother, Amen.") And the preacher, who knew his people very well, said, "Maybe we don't understand what it means. <u>Amen</u> really means, 'I'm in favor of it, and I'm willing to share my part of the expenses.'".....a free translation, but "Blessed are they who hear the Word of God, and <u>keep</u> it."

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Laetare. The Fourth Sunday in Lent March 24, 1968

"KEY WORDS OF LENT: COMPASSION"
(John 6:5)

It's a Pat-and-Mike story that I'm about to be tellin' ye, as a starter, that is, and by my own hasty admission, a rather unconventional way to begin a sermon - - -

Pat says to Mike, "Mike, if you had ten thousand dollars, would you give me half?"

Mike says, "And shure and I would!"

Pat says to Mike, "And if you had five thousand dollars, would you give me half?"

Mike says, "And shure and I would!"

Pat says to Mike, "If you had ten dollars, would you give me half?"

And after a long uncomfortable pause, Mike sadly laments, "But Pat, ten dollars is all that I've got!"

Even a Pat-and-Mike story has its moral. There are any number of people who would do great and wonderful things, with the money they haven't got.

An enterprising newspaper editor in a small community in all likelihood is about to give the assignment to his Roving Reporter -- the question for the day -- "Go out and get as many interesting answers as you can." One time this was the question that was chosen by that newspaper editor in that small town:

"If you suddenly came into possession of a small fortune, how would you spend it?"

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How we enjoy spending money we don't have, how we enjoy spending other people's money.....so the answers were given.

One answer, as I remember reading the list:

> "If I came into possession of a small fortune, I'd give the greater part of it to cancer research . . . "

Another answer:

> "If I came into possession of a small fortune, the very first thing that I would do -- I'd buy a round-trip ticket to Ireland, and give it to my old daddy, who has never been back to his native land since he came to these shores."

And I still recall the third answer:

> "If I came into possession of a small fortune, I'd build a cottage by the sea for my mother, so that in her aging years she could be amid the surrounding that she loves so dearly . . . . and furthermore, I'd take some money and I'd establish a trust fund so that as long as she would live, she'd never want financially."

So the question was raised....and the answers came.

But what the editor seemingly never had the courage to do was to ask the question that comes quickly to the mind of any student of human behavior patterns - - "With whatever money that you already have, what -- now -- are you doing toward these objectives?"

> ...with whatever money you already have, what good thing are you doing for your aging parents?
>
> ...with whatever money you already have, what contribution are you making toward cancer research?

....there are any number of people who would do great and wonderful things, with money they don't have.

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But the demands of life are usually made upon us to begin where we are with what we have. You shan't get very far forever dealing with the hypothetical. It may be amusing, it may be intriguing, but the demands of life press hard upon us and wait for an answer now.

I don't know how you found it, but for myself, I quickly say that no matter how often I read this Gospel lesson, that comes in mid-Lent, this Gospel lesson that was read for you today from the 6th chapter of John, I'm forever fascinated by it. For here was Jesus Christ, God's lonely Galilean, the Itinerant One, going from place to place and getting a following. Then one day He stands and sees Himself being surrounded by a mass of people...and as He looks upon these people He's made aware of only one thing - - they pose a problem.....they pose a problem.

Now by the way, if you're somebody who is about to categorize people always into two groups, for the purpose of this sermon this morning, there are only two groups of people in life: there is the group of people who realize that the problem exists - - they recognize it at once....
....then there's another group of people who remain absolutely insensitive to the fact that there is any such thing as a problem surrounding them

.....only two groups of people:

-- those who call the problem by name

-- those who never so much as say that there is a problem.

One of the surprises that comes to some of us after we've reached forty is that the signs for the highway of life continued to be earmarked in this manner: "PROBLEM AHEAD" - - "PROBLEM AHEAD" - - "PROBLEM AHEAD". How

foolish some of us have been. We labored for years, as we began to mature, seemingly, under the mistaken notion that maybe by the time we hit forty or forty-five we will have come face to face with practically every major problem....that from there on in life would give us nothing but a plateau. But one thing that some of us have discovered is that that plateau recedes -- it's never quite there on the horizon. You know how we say to ourselves...

"...if only we can get him through junior high!"

"....if only we can live for that moment when he walks across the platform and he has the high-school diploma safely in his hands!"

...knowing what happens to youngsters on college campuses these days:

".....if only we can see him all the way through college!"

So you see, the older we become, the more we wish it were different. But the nature of the problem changes, the problem remains. Human situations may vary, but the predicament of man is always to be found the problem area! Harry Emerson Fosdick (you remember, I used to tell you this, and don't you forget it.....and this is why you ought never to allow a preacher to go to the pulpit without praying for him, that, in the words of the old Quaker, he might speak to your condition).....

....Harry Emerson Fosdick, the beloved professor of Homiletics in Union Seminary, used always to tell his students in the preaching class: "Remember, when you stand up to preach, that as you look into the faces of your people, there's a problem behind the face of every single person."

Well, you want to categorize people? Two groups:

-- those who mature enough to be able to recognize a problem

-- those who remain immature and never so much as know that there's a problem existing.

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Now, if you want to subdivide the first group, of those who recognize that a problem exists, there are two groups:

- - one group that says, "Let's do something about it now!"
- - the other group, having recognized the problem, believe it to be absolutely overwhelming, and suffers under the notion that there isn't anything that can be done.

Go back and read that 6th chapter according to John, and there you find Jesus Christ, standing up as big as life itself, and being made aware of a problem, He turns to His disciples and He says, "What are we going to do about it? - - how are we going to manage?"

...life is always putting that question to us! Foolish that we are, we spend so much of our time trying to figure out why the problem is there. Jesus Christ begins by saying, "There it is! What are you going to do about it?" It's God's eternal challenge to man: "What are you going to do about it?"

If you shan't press me too hard, hear me out now in this way. The multitude had come to hear Jesus preach. We're told there were five thousand of them there. Jesus Christ says, "There's a problem -- they have to be fed." You notice, that's what He says.

...now don't press me too hard as I tell you how He did not begin.....

Being made aware of the problem, He did not begin by saying:

"I shall appoint a committee"....and then He looked around to the twelve disciples and He saw Peter, James and John, and He said, "You are the committee....I expect you to do something about this.... ...and the next time we gather together, you bring in your report" .....this He did not do.

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Nor did He do this:

He did not say, "Let's evaluate the situation right now and let's prepare a questionnaire....

Question No. 1: Why did you come here?

Question No. 2: How did you get here?

Question No. 3: How long did it take you to get here?

Question No. 4: What were your resources by the time you left home? what happened to them in the meantime? "

.....none of these questions.

Valuable as a committee may be, and useful as we may find a questionnaire and a survey, there comes a time when something has to be done immediately.... ...and when that time occurs, there are no options, there are no alternatives ...you simply begin with what you have, where you happen to be. This is God's recommended procedure.

Oh, I forgot to tell you, and yet I deliberately planned the sermon this way - - I didn't much impress upon you that the Scriptures say that when Jesus Christ put the question to them, that He himself knew exactly what He was going to do! Take that as a measure of encouragement, my friend. And what is that measure of encouragement but simply for you and for me to say to ourselves:

- - there is an answer! - - there is a way to solve this problem.

Last Sunday afternoon as I walked through the living room, I heard some of the men aspiring to the high office of the President of our land. One of them was entertaining questions, and one of the reporters put the very question that's in your mind: "Well, what would you do? What's your solution to this problem?"...

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.....and then the problem was named....and another problem was named....and another problem. And I remember the answer of the aspirant: "Well, I don't think there are any solutions to these problems" - - a perfectly safe answer, and albeit, it could be a perfectly honest answer.....and then he went on to say, "- - but you keep working away at the problem".

But some of us need a little bit more than this, and because we are believers in God, we have the encouragement that He has an answer -- now get this straight -- maybe the first sign of our maturing may be that we in our unwisdom do not have all the answers. But God does. And this could be our short-coming, that we concentrate too much on our efforts -- let me put it for you this way, as though everything depended upon our ability, when rather, it depends upon our pliability in the hand of God.

Jesus Christ says, "What are you going to do about it?" - - as much as to say, "Can we begin now, with what you have?" There are some things that God himself will never do by himself and by himself alone. And there are times when God waits for us to take the first step.

When you come to visit us in the new Parsonage, maybe you'll have time to stay long enough, and if I'm there I particularly would like to have you visit my study. After a man spends a quarter of a century in the ministry, he begins to gather some precious mementoes. At the one end of my study, on the top shelf of the lower bookcases, there they are, strung out....

> ...the Communion case, with a portion of wine still in the chalice. It was last used by that marvelous soul in God who was my spiritual father in the Faith, who married Winifred and me, who baptized our two boys. Upon his death I was given that Communion case.....

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...that hargille, the Oriental Turkish pipe, where the smoke goes down through the water and then comes out apparently cooled and purified, that my father used to smoke.....

....oh, I could name them for you.

But also included among these artifacts, so to speak, is a rather odd-looking thing that hangs on the wall, about this wide, about that tall, - - there's a series of five or six wooden pipes. They came out of the first pipe organ that Messiah's Church in South Williamsport (where I began my ministry) had in their ministry of worship. The organ was installed back at the turn of the century, about 1902 - 1904, I think. They refer to it as a "Carnegie" organ. Oh, there's no Carnegie organ-maker, but they got a sum of money from Andrew Carnegie, the great philanthropist. He had a glorious bent, those days.....he went spreading his money throughout America, some places he gave a library to a community, and they called it the Carnegie Memorial Library.....and then for churches, if they felt they needed a pipe organ, he wanted them to get a pipe organ. These pipes are from that "Carnegie" pipe organ. It's a memento that preaches a sermon to me. Carnegie said to those people, "All right, you want a pipe organ? I think you ought to have one. You raise the first half of the money that's needed, and I'll give you the second half."

.....an excellent bit of wisdom.

.....begin with what you have. ....begin to produce, with whatever it is that you have, no matter how little.

I think that's the way God works. God's saying, "You can always count on me to put the finishing touches, in a grand and glorious manner.....but you take the first step."

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Now all of this is possible and is pleasing in God's sight as long as we're moved by compassion. There's no end to the good that can be done as long as we're moved by compassion. You see, there's this subtle implication, in this 6th chapter of John. One reading puts it this way:

> "And seeing the multitude, he had compassion on them . . "

....and then the miracle happened after that. That's the way miracles happen - - - they're motivated by love. And God works best in an atmosphere of love.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Passion Sunday March 31, 1968

"KEY WORDS OF LENT: REJECTION"
(John 8:59)

It could well be that anyone who recalls his school days remembers the school-ground bully. It dulled a little bit of the excitement for recess for some of us, because we were never quite sure but by the time recess was over we wouldn't have had to encounter him somehow. And if he didn't bloody our nose during recess, then there might be the prospect of having to go through it when school was over, as he waited for us in the alley that we were wont to take on our way home.

As one recalls these days, he's also haunted by the jingle of the adage that we used to recite to one another -- whether we told it in comfort or not, I'm not quite certain, but maybe you heard it too -- it goes like this:

"He who fights and runs away,
Shall live to fight another day."

I don't know exactly what that meant. Did it mean that you might as well stick it out this time, you might as well make the most of this encounter, get him while you can, give him everything you have, even though your face be bloodied and your head bowed....because there's always the prospect that you might have to go through it another time...so make the most of this moment - -

"He who fights and runs away,
Shall live to fight another day."

Or is this a justification for retreat and withdrawal?

"He who fights and runs away,
Shall live to fight another day."....well then, get out

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of this as soon as you can. Save your strength for the next day....it might be worse than now. Well, no matter how you read it, there's always the emphasis to be put upon the 'other day'....so much as to say, You'll never be able to get away from this completely -- there's always going to be the time of encounter, there's always going to be the time of struggle.

One of the readings of life that some of us have these days is that this is an age of struggle, that this is an age of strife, that this is a time of tension.....and there's no place to hide. You just can't run away from it anywhere. Strife, tension, struggle raises its ugly head <u>everywhere</u>. There are those who remonstrate with me and tell me that no matter how idyllic I think that home town is from which I came, that even when I go back now, they tell me, I shan't find it the same....for even <u>there</u> there is conflict, there is strife, there is tension.....and maybe there is no such thing any more as a "peaceful valley."

If you listened carefully when the Gospel lesson was being read today, that 8th chapter of the Gospel according to John, you found it being dramatized for us in a very real and genuine way. Talk about strife and struggle and tension -- that chapter just reeks with it. A handful of people were giving Jesus Christ a mighty hard time. So much so, that they had reduced him to the role of an arguer, and it could well be that when Jesus went home that night, He must have gone home very weary, because from a purely human point of view, it takes a great deal out of a man to be reduced to the point of an arguer. It's the one thing that

some of us try to escape, because once you force a man to argue, you may reduce him to your level - - and once you force a man to argue, you run the risk of having reason go by the board. To argue can mean emotional involvement, to argue can bring you to the point where you might lose all regard for the truth itself, to the extent that you find yourself almost hating the person.....who just can't see your point of view, and whom you can't quite convince. Nonetheless, they had their day, and they brought Him down to the role of an arguer.

But after a while, according to the record, He put on a disappearing act, and He went away. The time does come when the manly thing to do (and no Christian should be anything less than a man!) may be to just quit arguing and to put on a 'disappearing' act! Evil by its very nature rejects truth, and when it's absolutely clear that people are by evil possessed, they're just not worth arguing with. So you have this very unusual moment in the life of our Lord, when He shuts up (put it that way) quits arguing, and gets Himself away from the mess as quickly as He can.

Do you hear those words now....

"He who fights and runs away,
Shall ~~life~~ live to fight another day."

...and our Blessed Lord did have His other day. What we do during Lent, we ought not to forget this, is to concentrate upon the struggle that Jesus Christ had while He was here on earth. We ought not to be the Easter Christians -- and by that I mean the type of person who thinks only of the Easter faith, who concentrates upon the moment of victory and triumph. But Lent says, behind that victory and triumph were those agonizing days, those seasons of struggle. Today in the Lenten season we're forced to recognize

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that He even had His day when the enemies of truth would reject Him, and if they could have gotten away with it, they would have killed Him on the spot - - on that day.

Now can we ask the question: what was the cause of this argument? what brought them to this point of rejection?

Quite bluntly, it was the demand that Jesus Christ was making upon them in the present moment. He was confronting them where they were, then and there, with the fact of truth. Now it's an interesting observation to make that most of us don't have too great difficulty in accepting the truths of God when we talk about the days that have come and the days that have gone. If I kept preaching to you about the Old Testament, I don't think I'd have much trouble with any of you . . .

> ...you'd nod agreeably to the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Jeremiah, Joshua....the-God-who-was -- the God who made claims upon people then and there. We're not about to reject the God-of-the-Past, if you may ever use that figure of speech for God, as though you can push Him back to a period of time, and lock Him up, and say this is the only thought of God that a man can have.....
>
> .....none of us perhaps might find too much difficulty talking about the God-of-the-Future, the God who is all wrapped up in things yet to come.....

But our trouble always comes when we're confronted by the God-of-the-Present-Moment, the God who confronts us where we are, with the issues of the day.

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This 8th chapter of the Gospel according to John is simply the dramatization of what's always going on between God and man. There seems to be this ceaseless struggle -- man always giving God a tough time. And if you'll let me say it quickly and rather recklessly, and you'll understand of course, but sometimes it appears that we're more than what God Himself can handle!.....because we do have the power of crucifixion, we do have the power of rejection, and even God won't force His truth upon us.....

"He who fights and runs away,
Shall live to fight another day."

...<u>because</u> truth cannot be grounded, truth cannot be defeated - - it always has to be dealt with.

So today we may have our moments when we argue with Jesus, when the living Christ confronts us with the issues of our time....

...such as, man's inhumanity to man...

- - and we say, "But Jesus, there will always be such inequity - - there will always be different levels of society".....and even though He quits arguing with us, He stands there with a searching glimpse into our souls.

...this whole business of war....

- - we may endeavor to justify it on one hundred different counts, and if we can't use any other argument, we'll say, "But Jesus, there have always been wars"....and all the time confronting us in the present moment.

...He confronts us with the fact of sin....

- - and then we excuse ourselves and say, "But we're by nature sinful".....and He stands there just the same, as though He's not

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going to accept that as an excuse -- as though that gave us the freedom to go on being sinful, if not to do the overt sinful deed.

You see, our problem is never with the so-called God-of-the-Past, and iti isn't with the so-called God-of-the-Future.....it's always with the God-of-the-Present-Moment. And that's what these people had on their hands -- God-come-to-them-in-Christ. And they thought they could deal with Him, by arguing with Him, or by picking up stones. They even were foolish enough one day to see Him dragged away to a city's brow, and to think that they could kill Him.....

"Truth crushed to earth rises again." It's this God-of-the-present-moment, you see, who is always confronting us. There's that chapter in the New Testament, when one day Jesus stood up to preach, and they drove Him out of the church. You know why? Because He said, Today, we ought to do something about this.....and He gave them to understand that He was going to do something about it.

Shall we go on forever like this? Will the story of man have to be the story of man's rejection of God? Won't we ever learn?

Here and there there is someone who stands up and says,

"I believe Him.....I trust Him.....

I'll bank my life on what He says.....

...and I'll take my first step in that direction...today."

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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B.S.

Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Palmarum. The Sixth Sunday in Lent April 7, 1968

"WHEN THE KING COMES"

Three questions, if you please, each pretty much the same, yet there's some variation upon a common theme:

- - any takers for the human race these days?

- - anyone with a good word for the likes of us?

- - anyone willing to stand up and to claim us?

So I begin this sermon, on this day that has been called by the President of our nation as a day of national mourning.

At the risk of being misunderstood, I do not come to this sacred place to mourn the death of any one man. Rather, I have come to mourn the sickness-unto-death of the human spirit. We are a sick people. And the worst of all sicknesses is to be sick and not know it, not to recognize the need to mark the path that leads to the physician's house.

We are disturbed in mind, we are diseased in soul. Something has happened to us.....

...with assassins' rifles, there are those among us who kill...

...with greed and avarice, there are those among us who loot and who plunder -- with senselessness...

...there are those among us who set fire to our homes, to our stores, and who make a shambles of our cities....

...with utter disdain for law and order, there are those among us who preach and who practice civil disobedience, with marked disregard.....

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...there are those among us who boo and who hoot some of our highest officials, and ridicule them to the degree that they are forced in silence from the podium....

...with hate-filled hearts, there are those among us who set off the bigot's blast, calling black men names that I would not so much as utter from this sacred desk -- only in return to be spontaneously matched by the scream and the shout of the black man -- "Whitey, it's your turn! -- Whitey, burn, baby, burn!" . . .

...with well-intentioned preaching of non-violence, there are those among us who are incited by that very same preaching to practice violence....

We are a sick people. Something has happened to us.

And even though we may be somewhat removed from what's going on, it isn't a very great distance, and no man becomes an island to himself, and no suburb can be comfortably or complacently separated from the area to which it remains a contiguous part. We all share in the sickness.

And when we take it seriously, we say, "How much more, O God?" -- for some of us are living out the days of our years in this generation as a people disillusioned, for we can categorize our day as one major disappointment after another - -

...did not I stand, an eager-eyed youth, on a high school platform, back in the 30's, and recite with all the fervor of a dreamer the Preface to the Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact?....and I graduated from high school honestly believing that I would grow up and live in a world without war!

- - I had read about World War I -- I had heard about the League of Nations,

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only to discover that when I became a man, the halls of the League of Nations were left empty on the shores of Lake Geneva.

-- then came World War II, and before I knew it I was beginning to appreciate what that distinguished Britisher said, "I am seeing the lights of Europe go out one by one, and I do not think that I shall live to see them go on again in my time."

-- I began my ministry to a people whose sons and daughters went off to war -- 365 from one parish -- and I suffered and agonized with them ...I conducted services for those who were lost in action...I conducted services for one who was part of a death march in Bataan. I cried. I wept unashamedly.

-- that day when I was awakened on a Sunday afternoon, in a brief siesta from a very busy day, and heard the news of Pearl Harbor....only to look over and to see in that same room an infant, still in a crib, and with whatever wisdom and perception God gave me then, I said to myself, he'll grow up to deal with the scars of this thing as long as he lives. Little did I know then that one day he might reach the point where hands of blessing would be placed upon his head, as he would be set aside as a Minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Then the war was over. We put all of our eggs in one basket, so we thought -- United Nations. But despite the United Nations, there was Korea.....and after Korea, Vietnam.....and to those who rise with a prophet's voice and say, "And after Vietnam -- all of southeast Asia!" ...they take your finger and point on a map....to Central America....to South America.....and the seething unrest which is Africa.

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Then there was a ray of hope, for a younger generation, if not for some others. He was youthful. He had a spring in his step and he had a light in his eye. And he had a rendezvous with a better tomorrow. But an assassin's bullet took him from our midst....

...unless you happened to have a son, or a daughter, who became captivated by his enthusiasm.....I attended graduation at American University, the last important address that John F. Kennedy delivered. I have been walking rather closely with one of those students ever since. There was a shock the like of which most of us can't appreciate. They too have their dreams, and they too have their hopes. What a disappointment. - - and then we've been confronted in recent time with all the unrest of the younger generation. We just can't quite understand why they don't behave like decent normal human beings. We've been disappointed..... ....they've been disappointed. For what have we given them, we who have under our belt seething unrest, two world wars to our credit -- what have we given them?

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And we've brought them into a world which for the first time has hovering over it the threat of complete annihilation. Each man speaks out of the depth of his own heart. Why, even as a youngster I was afraid that somehow the world would come to an end before I grew up, not knowing the means by which or the way the world would come to an end. But now, the uncertainty is removed, and it's a possibility. And as over against all of this, 9,000 - 11,000 troops, scattered throughout a city, within blocks of where you are now seated....not just a city, but the capital of what some of us honestly believe is the most important nation in the world today, by way of the exercise of responsibility in

behalf of all mankind is concerned....not just that city, but many cities throughout the land.

So I come to this day, declared by the President of our nation as a time of national mourning. And at the risk of being misunderstood, I do not come to this holy place to mourn the death of any one man, but to mourn the sickness-unto-death which afflicts the human spirit.....

- - any takers for the human race?

- - anyone with a good word for the likes of us?

- - anyone willing to stand up and to claim us?

On this Palm Sunday, one hears the echoing voice of the prophet down the corridors of time:

"Behold, your king comes to you"

So in a time of unrest, centuries before our day - - so in a time of disillusionment and disappointment, centuries before our day, God raised up a prophet, and put upon his lips these words:

"Your king is coming. There is someone
who will claim you, there is someone
who wants to give you a Kingdom . . . "

- - anyone for the likes of us? God says "Yes! I'll claim you. I'll give you a King, and you can be part of the Kingdom."

Arthur Miller, the distinguished playwright, scorches and sears our souls when he apprizes us dealing with one of the issues of the day. Having discussed it at length, he says the tragedy of our time is we neither affirm it, or deny it.....we simply abdicate. Ours, says he, is an age of abdication. And this could be your tragedy and mine! -- with the great and important issues of our day, overwhelmed by them, we simply step aside! We abdicate to the forces of futility. Not so, says the prophet -- your King will come. Let Him

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take over. Let him establish His Kingdom.

But believe me, my friend, it takes a bit of doing even for God to establish His Kingdom. It takes a bit of doing for God even to make you and me reflect something of the spirit of heaven itself. God has to deal with the likes of us!

> ...we who are prone to sell one another short!
>
> ...we who are so quick to look for perfection in our brother, and condemn him when we see only imperfection, and never so much as see the error in our ways!

It takes God a while to fashion His Kingdom, but in Him and through Him is the only hope. This is what I keep saying to myself, this is why I go on preaching, that maybe some day we may try His way, and accept Him as our coming King.

This may serve as a tonic to your soul, and a necessary corrective, for I honestly believe that the tension of our day lies between those who are impatient, who want every panacea fulfilled by tomorrow morning at ten o'clock - - the tension lies between those, and all the rest who believe that we can well afford to take our time, to delay. And in such tactics, we may be prone to commit the greater error of abdication.

Now I told you, as the corrective: would you take this to heart.....

If we reduce the existence of the planet, this planet of ours, to a fifty-year span - -

> - - it took forty-nine of those years before even the first primitive agricultural stage was reached....if we reduced the existence of our planet to a fifty-year span, it took man forty-nine years until he knew how to handle the earth, and

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raise his food and his crops — it took him that long to figure out the best way to feed himself, let alone the best way to feed other people.

- - if we reduce our existence on this planet to a fifty-year span, writing began only six months ago...

- - printing only two weeks ago....

- - electricity only twenty-four hours ago, out of this fifty-year span.....

- - organized efforts after world peace began only a few minutes ago! - - only a few minutes ago in this fifty-year span, did man begin to recognize that all men are brothers....

Do you know that it wasn't until the ninth century, under Alfred, that England became a nation? - - that up until that time those who lived in Wessex saw themselves as a people complete, and disregarded all the rest; and this was true for Sussex; and this was true for the people of Northumberland. Only after nine centuries did they see themselves as a nation, that one island on the face of the globe.

Do you know that in 1870 there was a man who stood up in Harford County, Maryland, and said, "I am first a citizen of this county, and after that a citizen of the State of Maryland....and after that, then I'm a citizen of the United States of America - - - in 1870!

It's only been a few minutes ago that, in this fifty-year span, that anybody has been talking about the brotherhood of man, and the solidarity of the human race. So this is our tension, to keep working earnestly, steadily, despite any

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evidence of defeat. Man's inhumanity in this cruel hour dare not deter us. God's sending us a King. His Kingdom can be established.

One final word. I find it difficult when I get on my knees to pray, to pray to Lord Jesus Christ as though he had a white face.....and by the same token, I am absolutely infuriated when so-called Christians in a Detroit church take a statue of Jesus Christ, and paint the face of Jesus Christ black.

...there is no Christ for the black man, and for the black man alone

...there is no Christ for the white man, and for the white man alone

...there is no Christ for the East, and for the East alone

...there is no Christ for the West, and for the West alone

...when I get on my knees, I fairly shudder

- - because I know I'm praying to the Christ who is the Lord of history, and He is the Judge of all of us - -

"Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us!"

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

(Palm Sunday, April 7, 1968, declared as a day of national mourning by the President following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)

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Prayer - Litany prepared by Pastor Shaheen for the day declared as a day of national mourning by the President following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. - April 7, 1968

O GOD, by Thy Sovereignty, Creator and Upholder of the World:

Hear us, we pray;

O GOD, by Thy Sovereignty, Crucified Lord, Maker of Triumph out of man's cruelty:

Hear us, we pray;

O GOD, Ever Present One, Whose reign is energized by redemptive love:

Hear us, we pray;

O GOD, Judge Eternal, we see in the troubles of our day a just doom, the consequence, according to Your laws and commandments, of our neglect and of our defiance of Your Will:

Have mercy upon us, O Lord;

By Thy becoming one of us in Christ, and by His life of want and tears and toil, by His endurance of our humiliation and inhumanity, by His taking unto Himself our rejection of Him, by present-day repetition of all the sins that took Him to Calvary:

Have mercy upon us, O Lord;

Because of our indifference to the needs of the disadvantaged, Because of our self-righteous insistance upon perfection in our brothers, because of our self-righteous condemnation of imperfection in our brothers, because of our common guilt that's involved in the death of just men, because of our blindnesses to the injustices dealt our fellow men:

We confess our sins unto Thee,
O God, and plead for mercy;

We poor sinners do beseech Thee to hear us, O Lord God, and to so quicken our hearts and hands that we may this day give tangible evidence of our concern for those in need; to so still each of us that we may be numbered among Thy agents who preserve our country from discord and contention; and so open our eyes to the good, to the good that we can do, that this night before we sleep we shall know ourselves to be agents of reconciliation, particularly with anyone from whom we have been estranged; to make us appreciative of the responsibility that rests upon all our leaders, in whatever area they may be found, that we may hold them up before Thee in the arms of our prayers for your grace and wisdom, rather than tear them down by our unwise or uncharitable remarks; to make this, our congregation, a force for good, wherever its influence can be extended, and particularly in this hour, in breaking down the barriers that exist among men; to unite ourselves with those whose needs are great, body and soul, that we may not fail them nor Thee; that we may earnestly strive for social and economic justice in a way which is pleasing to Thee. Hear us, O God of our Salvation, for the glory of Your Name. Amen.

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"IN HIS STEPS"
(I Peter 2:21)

There is a text, my friend -- you won't forget it, will you? It's that first verse from the Epistle for the Day. Tuck it away in the recesses of your mind.....let it come bobbing back and forth throughout the course of the presentation of the sermon. And the text:

" . . Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."

Christians come in all sizes and all ages, they're quite an assortment. Some are tall...some are short; some are fat...some are thin; some are young...some are old...some are middle-aged. As far as Nero was concerned, he could make his choice at random, the only qualification being that he is a Christian. Then, having made the choice, Nero, that diabolically-possessed man with that twisted mind, issued the order: "Let the Christian now have his clothing removed - let his clothing be replaced in this manner: tied around his body will be the skins of wild animals....then let this strangely-garbed Christian come to my garden . . . "

Nero had invited his friends. At a precise moment vicious dogs were unleashed....as Nero and his friends laughed, the Christian was torn to shreds.

And if you think that was bad, brace yourself for this....on occasion he'd take Christians -- that was the only qualification, just certain that he was a Christian....his body was dipped in oil, and in the very same garden, when darkness settled in, for illumination they ignited the bodies of the

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Christians. This was all part of the pattern of persecution that was let loose like Hell when Nero reigned.

It was about the last thing that could happen. Oh, prior to persecution they had to deal with slander. Word had gotten around that these Christians were strange people.....

> ....they gathered together in cliques, they were a closed company. They had some kind of a ritual that they observed when they got together....and just before they left they embraced each other -- they kissed one another...goodness knows what else happened.....

So they were dealt with with this kind of slander.

It was also said that they had a strange custom -- they talked about eating somebody's body....they talked about drinking somebody's blood. Slander had it that they were cannibalistic.

Meeting together as a closed company, the word got around that they were subversive -- goodness knows what they might do! Insignificant in humber as they were, diabolically-possessed Nero issued the order of persecution.

He never did like Rome, you know. So it's a matter of historical record, so they tell us, that he fiddled while Rome burned. But there was untoward reaction to the conflagration. Somebody had to be blamed. Nero's great moment: if slander didn't work, persecution will. So he blamed it on the Christians.

Against that period in time, against that background, a letter was being circulated, written by the first Bishop of Christians. Small wonder that

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when this group of Christians, wherever they were, got it, they read this verse that I gave you as the text....

> "Christ also suffered for you,
> leaving you an example, that you
> should follow in his steps - - "

....small wonder that somebody didn't stand up and say, using the jargon of the day - - "Cancel the subscription! - - let's not have that kind of stuff coming into our homes! -- let's not have anybody telling us that this is the order for the day.....it's bad enough to have the cloud of persecution resting upon us, but then to have the chief Bishop write and tell us that we're expected to face it, we're expected to endure it - - - "

And if you think this is bad, this text in the Epistle for today, wait until you come back next Sunday - - if I remember these Epistle Lessons correctly....it could be that it's next Sunday you get a verse that reads something like this (Oh, I'm not planning to preach on it -- there's another sermon being planned)....but in next Sunday's Epistle, if I remember correctly, there's a verse that says something about....

> "It's one thing if you suffer because you deserve it. But if having done the good thing, you suffer for it, and you take it patiently, God's going to smile on us . . . "

What gives! What shall we make of this kind of thing? This remains for many Christians the unresolved problem.....why a good God allows people to suffer.....

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....why a good God will even permit suffering to be the order of the day. Not just suffering in general, but suffering by good people, who give themselves to good causes. It remains for many Christians the unresolved problem.

During the days of Nazi Germany there was a handful of people who said, "Hitler is the cancer - - he is diabolical - - he's 20th-century Satan. He must be eradicated!" Nobly intentioned, they plotted the death of Adolph Hitler, an attempt that died aborning.

Let me read for you these words, written in final despair by one of that group, a friend of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Dr. Carl Goerdeler -- a devout Christian, a leader in the resistance movement. Now just before he was executed by the Gestapo, he cries out: "God lets millions of decent people suffer and die without raising a finger. Is this justice? What a botcher of a God who knows the wrong-doers and the apostates and punishes the upright and the faithful. No! It is inconceivable - - like the Psalmist I argue with God because I do not understand Him . . . "

...and then he goes on to say,

and I would interpolate - - he cries out in his incredulity: "Whom He loves, He takes early to Himself" ...(another way of our saying it: 'only the good die young'). "No," says Goerdeler, "This is not comfort; it is intolerable."

Albert Camus echoes the same despair in trying to understand the Christian God. Speaking to us Christians he says, "I share with you the same revulsion from evil. But I do not share your hope; and I continue to struggle against this universe in which children suffer, in which innocent people are brought to death."

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So presumably the chief Bishop of their souls, writing this circular letter as an epistle of hope, says to them against their back-drop of persecution:

> "Christ also suffered for you,
> leaving you an example, that you
> should follow in his steps."

We've never known persecution. Have we? As I scan the congregation hurriedly, maybe only one or two of you have ever known what it ever is to be in prison, for political reasons, as you lived away from these shores. We've never known persecution. Yet these Christians were being told that they were to endure it.

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I have a guilty conscience every time I come to this pulpit, that is, when I think about it.....there are some things that I deliberately push aside - - it's painful to think about some things.....but when I do, I suffer a guilt feeling, when I think of Kai Monk, the Dane, the young preacher, who went to a pulpit Sunday after Sunday, who could not stand the oppression of the persecuter, the Gestapo....and he spoke out against the evil, the cancer of his day. Do I tell you correctly when I say they warned him once, they warned him twice, they warned him three times. Then that next Monday morning they found his body, riddled by bullets, by the side of the road. How could a God who is good allow a life like that, so young and noble, whose only passion was the passion for truth, to suffer, to die?

When you come to church, there's no one standing outside, keeping a record as to who you are and how often you come here. But there are Christians who are being persecuted that way in certain parts of the world.

Your son or daughter may get that state scholarship and the Government may

give a gracious subsidy to take off from you the burden of financial drain to guarantee an education - - there'll be no questions asked as to whether you're a Christian or not. But there are certain parts of the world, certain parts of Europe, where youngsters will never get an education, as they are being persecuted because they happen to be Christian.

How do you believe in a good God that lets things like that happen? It remains for many people the unresolved problem.

Last Monday morning I spoke with David and Ellen, living in Philadelphia. They told about a friend of theirs whose father lived in Baltimore. He was one of the few men, extraordinary men, who refused to move out of a changing neighborhood. He was a watch-maker...did an honest day's work.

During the rioting they completely destroyed his place. Gone was his place of business, ruined were his prized instruments, passed on to him, presumably, by his forbears. Now facing the sunset years of life, he's denied the gratification of working with his hands, using these cherished instruments. He has no will now to go back. Why? - - when so nobly intentioned!

But white men are not the only people who suffer. Suffering knows no color line. I sat across the table at the Executive Council meeting from this man, Bill Ellis, who is coming here on Saturday night.....articulate...capable .....and he said to all of us who were there, "My people suffer too. And perhaps the greatest of all our suffering lies in the fact that our leader has been assassinated. This is our suffering."

For many people it remains the unresolved problem.

Now to go back to the text....bobbing back and forth in your minds, haunting you: "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should

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follow in his steps".....what can we make of it?

Deduction Number One: Christ also suffered.

While nine-tenths of our time or maybe nine-tenths of our life and greater may not be given to suffering, realistically, life still includes on the agenda of every man's pilgrimage a turn in the road labeled SUFFERING. So it appears on the map of life, and on the agenda of his business routine. Never shall we entertain the thought that somehow we can table it, never again to pick it up, or put it on the agenda called 'Unfinished Business' -- to be picked up at our leisure. Life has a way of including for every man, somewhere, somehow, a chapter called "Suffering." And God-come-to-us-in-Christ was no exception. God did not place around Jesus Christ an invincible shield, but once He became man, He suffered....."Christ also suffered."

Christ's suffering, we say to ourselves, is a suffering that He took upon Himself! He didn't suffer because He was a child of evil. The suffering He endured He took upon Himself. This is the highest kind of understanding of suffering -- a deliberate will to use it, and to offer it to God. I have the highest regard for my Roman Catholic friends, for I think they perhaps more than any other group of Christians have a way of instilling upon the minds of their people that when suffering comes, it's something that you take and offer up to God as a sacrifice, that it might become a sacrament! Beautifully expressed, and eloquently so, in the life of that Roman Catholic priest...young in years, mark you, whose noble intention was to give his life to being a bridge-builder, narrowing the gap between sinner and Saviour and isolated elements of mankind... ....and yet young in years, he was told that he had cancer, a life of suffering until he died. What was his eloquent reaction: "I thank God that He trusts me

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with cancer" . . . which is only to say that "He honestly believes that I can use it to His Name's honor and glory."

"Christ also suffered, leaving us an example, that we should follow in his steps" .....suffer? It could be that white man in Baltimore could say one day, "I shall suffer through this, because though undeserved, I recognize the cry and the anguish of a people." It's one thing to suffer when you've done wrong. It's another thing to suffer when you take upon yourself the hurt of somebody else. One of the greatest things ever said about a medical missionary was simply this: "When he came to us, he took upon himself our hurt."

I read last evening about a nurse, in England, who couldn't sleep at night when she thought about the suffering of other people. It became very real to her, and she took it upon herself. Do you know what she did? She turned herself loose, completely free, got a knap-sack, and hitch-hiked all the way to India.....some eight thousand miles away. And there she writes back, telling how she's identifying with that suffering mass of humanity.

I know whereof I speak, the damage that lies in insulating yourself against somebody else's suffering. I almost hang my head in shame when I tell you that those few years ago when I was in India, after spending six weeks there, I began to believe that maybe I'd better get out of there, because I was almost looking with unmoved reaction upon the misery of the masses. Do I speak for you when I say that my sore thumb is more real to me than all the impoverished in Africa or Asia? Do I speak for you when I say that my pinched toe is far more real to me than millions of people who live out the days of their years suffering because they are spiritually as well as physically starved?

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"Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example,
that you should follow in his steps . . . "

...I have handy on my desk a book that I recently got from England, called "YOUTH TO THE RESCUE" ...a tremendous thing by which young people are saying, in our day, "We'll go out and we'll find the people in need. We will go to them. We'll identify with their suffering."

...Yesterday I visited a booth at the Metropolitan Lutheran Planning Council. One of our own members was staffing it. She was fairly on tiptoe, I thought (I could be wrong, but maybe I was reading too much in it)....fairly on tiptoe when she told me about her plans for "Meals-on-Wheels"....."Pastor, we ought to be feeding 500 people a day - - the lonely, the impoverished - - "

...and I thought to myself, how do I explain this new-found joy in this person? Is not the answer to be said, somewhere, how, she's found a way to identify with the suffering of somebody else?

...I shan't ask them to stand up, and at some risk I'm going to announce their names just the same....

....Bryce and Mary

....Randy and Pat

....Paul and Sally

....John and Sandra.....members of our congregation who found out yesterday morning that the family in whom we have an interest, the mother of those many children, had to have emergency treatment in the hospital....."Who in Heaven's name will take care of the children?" - - " - in Heaven's name" <u>they</u> are - -

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...sleeping them, taking care of them, making sure that somehow tomorrow and the day after that something will be done.

"Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow in his steps."

As I conclude this sermon, I'm delighted to tell you that sometimes when you follow in the steps of Jesus Christ you'll be led to still waters, you'll be led to quiet harbors, you'll be led to a place where you can have a rendezvous....with all that is eternally peaceful and quiet. I'm delighted to tell you that that is true.

When you follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ you may be led to places where there are people of your kind, where you can laugh and joke, and have security in the blessing of a kindred spirit. So His footsteps led Him to the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus.

If you follow in His footsteps you may also be led where the undesirable live, and the disadvantaged, and where folks eke out their days in ghetto-like existence.

If you follow in His steps, you may discover that His footsteps are implanted upon a hill. The hill has a name - - - you can fill in the blank for yourself.

But mark you well, my friend, His footsteps are never frozen in history. They're not just implanted in one place. He's an itinerant one....He's always going where there's a need to be met....and He says that if we're to come after Him, we're to follow Him....

> "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ."

.....herein lies our salvation. We do have someone to follow.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Jubilate, The Third Sunday After Easter May 5, 1968

"AS SERVANTS OF GOD"
(I Peter 2:16)

Said the wise old man of some generations ago: "A little learning can be a dangerous thing - - ." That's particularly so if you've had just enough education to make you want to get at the root meaning of words, and to find out what a word that you might be using today really meant in the original.

Now take the Greek, for instance, as it's related to this text which serves as a basis for today's sermon: "Live as servants of God." Heaven forbid, this is no display of any attempt to become erudite, but that word in the Greek is not servant as you and I understand it. In this part of the New Testament, when they talk about people being God's servants, they use a very special word that means slave. There's another Greek word that means servant, and that's diakoni (?). But this word in the original, and it shakes one up a bit to recognize it:

"Live then as slaves of God."

Now don't settle back too comfortably as though this is going to be a word study, it's going to be completely irrelevant to your life. For a moment a word study it may be, but only that the word study might serve a useful purpose.

There's a world of difference between a servant and a slave. A servant may consult with his master, a servant may have certain duties for which he is responsible, a servant may have a day off. A slave, as we understood the meaning of the word, never had any time off, never had the right to

come and confer with his master. He was one who lived out the days of his years at his master's bidding, at his master's pleasure, according to his master's whim and wisdom, whatever the case may be. His life as a slave was never his own. He was completely possessed.

In some cases slaves were slaves because they had been purchased as such, and because a price had been paid in their behalf they were in duty bound to serve their master. When the great ones of the New Testament were referring to the type of person that a Christian ought to be, every now and then they used the word doulos - - he's to be a slave of God. You can't alter the New Testament, and even when you read it today, you are in duty bound, if you can, to go back to the original and deal with the basic meaning of the word. We then are to consider ourselves as slaves of God.

Now, waxing theological for a moment.

The writers of the New Testament, Paul and Peter particularly, knew themselves as people for whom a price had been paid. They were new men, they were freed men, they were living new lives.....and all because someone had purchased them, and that someone was Jesus Christ, with His own precious blood. Traditionally the Church refers to it as the redemptive deed in Christ, by which a man is brought into this relationship with God and freed from the bondage of sin. Yet as free men, say these great ones of the New Testament, you are at one and the same time God's slaves, for the simple reason that any man who has been made free remains forever in debt to the one who has freed him.

In that small town in which I grew up, I worked for a while in the barber shop. In the barber shop, as you can naturally understand, working closely

with people, you get to know them, their little idiosyncrasies, their weaknesses, you're even exposed to a little bit of their medical history...

> ...there was Michael Cahn, the farmer from Fairfield Township who came in to be shaved regularly. We observed him in the barber shop. We simply referred to him as "the man who had dizzy spells" - - and sometimes he would black out completely, if only for a little while. This I knew about the man.
>
> ...one day as I was standing on the curb in front of the barber shop, Michael came out and stood alongside of me. He was about to cross the street. Looking out of the corner of my eye, I saw a buddy of mine who had spotted me.....he had just gotten his driver's license. In that small town there were still many free places in which to park along the thorofare. He cut in, turned off the ignition, and glided in against the curb, coming at some rate of speed.....just in that moment, Michael got one of his dizzy spells, and started keeling over toward the street.
>
> ....it was one of the very few times in my life that I was able to react instantaneously and properly - - I grabbed hold of his arm. When Michael recovered and realized what had happened, knowing full well that I perhaps, the one person in life in that moment had saved his life, because had he been hit, the impact might have killed him, meant certain death for the old gent.....having recovered, he turned to me and very properly said, "I think you saved my life. . . how can I ever repay you?"

...I know whereof he speaks. Someone once saved me from drowning. To the day

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that I die, in my sober moments, I ought to be saying to myself, "How can I ever repay him? - - for there was that precise moment, you see, when the difference between life and death was being spelled out, and all because of one person.

The Christian knows that there's a difference between life and death for him, he's the free man, free from the bondage of sin, because Jesus Christ -- -- is my Saviour -- say it proudly....say it gratefully. This is what they thought, this is what they believed, this is what they taught, in the days of the New Testament. Then they said, "The only natural conclusion is that we shall be enslaved to Him who has done this thing for us."

Now how in the world does a man serve God as a slave?

....If a slave is one who is possessed....if a slave is one who has no rights, only duties....if a slave is one whose life is always according to the wish and the will of the master,

- - - how do we live out the days of our years as God's slaves?

George Franklin Dunkelberger, our beloved professor and dean in college days, traveled around the world. He came back with interesting things to tell us. Once he told us about visiting a monastery where he was told that inside a certain cubicle of sorts, was a monk who had kept himself separated from the rest of the world for decades....and as he gave himself completely to a life of contemplation, he honestly believed that he was serving God. Perhaps it doesn't behoove any one of us to question a man's way of serving God, but dare a man say (not pretending to be any kind of a wit), that perhaps he was so heavenly-minded, this monk in his cubicle, that he was no earthly good!

Whenever our Blessed Lord talked about serving God, He somehow brought

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people into the picture. Whenever Jesus Christ talked about pleasing God, He pointed His finger at the diseased and the disadvantaged, the deprived. You remember what He said in the parable of Judgment - - "Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren - - you have done it to me." A man is God's slave as he serves his fellowmen.....~~as he serves his fellow~~ man.

As God's slaves we are servants of our fellowmen, subject to call at any time, anywhere, wherever there is a man in need and to be served, as God's slave I must go into action.

There are many things that slaves did that they did not like, but they did them only because this is what the master said had to be done. In a certain sense, those of us who are Christian have no choice except to do what we know is pleasing to God. Our Blessed Lord once told a story about a man who was traveling a road, and became victimized.....and He sang the praise of a man who pleased God because he met that man's needs. He didn't first make a survey, he didn't first make a commission report....he asked no questions.....he only knew that a man had been victimized, and right then and there something ought to be done. He was the kind of man, you see, who practiced his religion anywhere, any time, and most especially where there was a need to be met.

We who love the Lord Jesus have to be very careful. We could easily allow ourselves to believe that we've served God by coming here one hour, on one day, to one place, with one particular group of people -- who happen to be like-minded, with whom, to all intents and purposes, we get along fairly well. But as God's slaves, subject to a call to action, there's no one-hour business, it's no one day business, there's no identification with one group

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business.....any time, anywhere.

Maybe a true understanding of Christian commitment is simply this:

> I don't know all about you, God, and I've never fully understood why you want things done the way you want things done, but I only know that if I'm to love and to serve you, then I'm to do things that are according to your pleasure.....not my liking, not according to my convenience....not according to my understanding of the situation.

To the group assembled in Bieber Hall last night I implied this part of the sermon that I'm now going to share with you. As God gives me memory, I'll never want to forget it. He's a product of our youth program here in Saint Luke Church. He came in from off the streets the night we were pre-occupied as to whether we would go on with the rehearsal for the chancel drama or not because we heard reports of the curfew in Washington, and the disorders, and the conflagration.....this young man comes up to Pastor Naegele, and says, "Pastor, what are we going to do?" He had his battered-up station wagon outside in the parking lot, poised for action. I want you to know that even though it was nothing but a modest trickle, that still steady, substantial flow -- food and clothing, into the people in the District who were terribly hurt by what was happening.....it all began by a youhg man who didn't stop to say, "They had it coming to them".....who didn't stop to say, "I don't know what happened or how it happened." He only knew that somebody was going to be hungry, and somebody was going to need some clothing.

For those of you who were in Bieber Hall on Palm Sunday, you might have been disconcerted momentarily when you heard noise in the kitchen. That noise was one of our men putting in the refrigerator forty cartons of milk, by one

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of our women who happendd to be at the eight o'clock service and heard the announcement....without consulting anybody else, as God's slave reporting for duty, she wanted to serve some people in need.

You see, this whole business of trying to get along with one another does have a Christian prescription: "Serve one another" - - "Help one another." This whole business of trying to get along with one another, it's never been an easy thing to do. Yet centuries ago there was someone who felt constrained to give young Christians advice at this point. He believed a sure way would be for each of them to look upon any relationship that might arise with somebody else as an opportunity to help, and to serve that person's need.

Oh, I could spell this out for you in many ways. We're all God's servants. How are you helping somebody else to fulfill his role as a servant? We who have been ordained -- who no matter what your image may be of us, know that we want to be God's servants, and as God's servants to be your servants....how are you helping us, to serve?

You've heard the illustration, haven't you - - it deals with this whole business of trying to get along with one another. Most of us are quite awkward at it -- it takes a bit of doing to mature. This is an illustration, I presume, that's been used by anyone that's ever done the circuit, the speaking circuit at banquets for United Givers Funds and such campaigns.....there is the recital of a fanciful tale...

...people had been invited to a banquet, a sumptuous affair. When they sat down to eat, the only instruments for eating were forks, four feet long. There were told that the forks were to be used (in this fanciful tale). No one got very much to eat, in his attempt to serve himself.. .....until someone suggested, "Why don't we serve one another?"

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Fourth Sunday After Easter — May 12, 1968

"WHEN IS A HOME CHRISTIAN?"

This second Sunday in May is being increasingly observed as the Festival of the Christian Home. Therefore, this sermon this day bears the title: "When is a Home Christian?" And if it's a text you'll be needing, the second chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, verses 51 and 52, speaking of Jesus, now:

> "And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. And his mother kept all these Things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man."

Only a fool would say that all is well with the world. Only a starry-eyed dreamer, completely out of touch with reality, would say that all is well with America. And none, it seems, is quicker to make this admission than the man who happens to be our Chief Executive, to say nothing of each of the publicly avowed aspirants to this high office.

For some of us, the shocking thing that came when the President spoke to us a number of weeks ago wasn't so much that he was declining the opportunity to be re-elected, but the very fact that he would admit, via television, to the whole world that America, so his words implicated, was not in a very happy condition.....either by what he said or by what you read between the lines, everything is not as it ought to be. There is something wrong. There is something the matter in America.

Whenever we become aware that something is wrong, our very first reaction is to blame somebody. Let's look for the cause. And so stained are we by

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original sin that we never happen to look inside ourselves, for the very natural reaction is to point the finger at somebody else. Remember now, how the sermon began, and to which, undoubtedly, you've also given some degree of credence - - all is not well with the world...there is something wrong in America.

Being made aware of this, there are scores of people who point their finger at the White House, or at the Supreme Court, or at the Pentagon, or at Congress.....and they say, "There's the culprit - - they are to blame." Stained by original sin, the first word that comes to our mind is they.

Some of us had the good fortune during the past week to have lunch on Capitol Hill, in fact practically all of us on the staff went down together, and we met with members of our own parish who have responsible positions in Congress. Some of us were fortunate to be seated at a particular table where my old friend, the Congressman from my home district, was seated. We engaged him in conversation. He's a very honest and a very able man. Oh, quite parenthetically, and perhaps of interest to you in Saint Luke Church, you ought to know how he decided to go to Congress. He was a business man, out there in north central Pennsylvania. And then one day he decided to take a study course, in politics, in government...a course which had been prepared and written by a member of this congregation. Highly motivated, he believed that he ought to do something for his people and for his nation. So he headed for Washington, and for more than a decade now he's been a good and responsible member of Congress....now all of this I say quite parenthetically.

In our conversation he told us that when he goes back to his district, and he believes that the mood and the temper of his district is quite typical

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of what you find in outlying areas, he says the people are mad, mad at anybody who happens to be in Washington. His political label is not at all important. The country's in a mad mood - - realizing that things are not right, they ought to be corrected, and so they say to anybody who is down there on Capitol Hill - - "Do something about it....correct it." So stained are we by original sin that it's the easiest thing in the world to say "They are to blame."

One of our pastors in a distant state, they tell me, went to his pulpit a few months ago and preached a stirring sermon on the title "America, Wake Up!" He was inspired to preach that sermon because he had read a book by the very same title, "America, Wake Up or Blow Up", written some sixteen, seventeen, eighteen years ago by Frank Laubach, that most extraordinary man who is the World Citizen, in which he believes that if America doesn't come to its senses, we'll bring down annihilation upon ourselves and the greater part of the world.

While I did not hear that sermon, the report is that he said something like this, undoubtedly thinking in much the same vein as this sermon this morning began - - ". . but the Government is not solely and singly to blame, where our national bedevilments reside, or where they are produced, or where they are cultivated. Our nation's inequities go deeper than politics or administration. America did not arrive at this dilemma in only a few years. We are reaping the results of the sins of years ago, as well as the sins of the present hour. And do you know who brought all this on, this alarming crisis in which we find ourselves right now? - - the American people."

I remember one of the earliest conversations that I ever had with that highly esteemed member of this parish, Bill Theis.....when I was talking to him

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out of his life and his experience on Capitol Hill. We were talking about the people who serve in Congress. We touched upon certain unusual personalities. And then incidentally we spoke about certain philosophies that prevail in a man's mind. And then he said, "But these people who are there -- they reflect their constituencies." And a member of this parish who served in Congress said that in reality the only thing that a man really has in stock and trade is votes. And have you yourself not said that every time a man goes to vote in Congress, no matter what the issue may be at stake, invariably he may do so against the background of the next election. So in all fairness, my friend, when you and I are tempted to point the finger and blame somebody else, maybe we might soberly say, "- - but they do represent us."

None of us can escape responsibility. It takes a great deal of courage to admit this. It's so much easier to blame somebody else....within the committee where you may operate.....within the family circle of which you are a part. If our children don't grow up the way we think they ought to grow up, we blame the times -- we blame the particular personality of the youngster. If a youngster is unhappy, he blames the people who happen to be his parents, to say nothing about lashing out against those who are in authority, whether it be the policeman on the corner or the principal in the administrator's office. It's the easiest thing in the world to blame somebody....particularly when we're confronted by all the frustrations of our situation.

Allen Walker, the distinguished Australian Methodist preacher, wrote a book a few years ago dealing with the new age. In fact, the title of his book is "A New Mind For the New Age." He outlines for us in his opening chapters the characterization of this new age of which we are a part. Some of us find it downright frightening to see how the world has changed, and to recognize

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the contributing factors to this change in this society, since World War II ....to say nothing of all the things that have happened since World War I. So great is the change that has been that there are certain people who say that any man of thirty-five years of age just doesn't understand what's actually happening.

~~Allen~~ ALAN Walker spends his early chapters telling us about this new age, and his chapters command respect. Then being a good and honest man, he says we ought to deal with something that may hold us in good stead as we go on living in this age from which we cannot escape. What are the things needful, if we are to fulfill our obligations as human beings? Would you be surprised if I were to tell you that his very first chapter is entitled, when he deals now with the correctives: "The Family First." For no matter what you may say, no nation can ever arise above the level of family life, and God had this in mind from the very beginning, because God created the family.

To say nothing more at this point, then, let's accept at face value that the family still serves a needful purpose, and that God still looks to the family by which His purposes will be accomplished.....hence the title for the sermon today, "When is a Home Christian?" - - because a home never rises to its full stature until it's characterized as being Christian. Please, I beg you, be mindful of the fact that God too has a strategy, and when God wanted to correct the ills of His world, He had the Incarnation in mind. So God comes to us in Christ.

Once the fact had been established, what do you suppose the first thing was that God did, to focus our eye upon it now, from a purely human point of view? God first looked around for a man and a woman, someone to be a father,

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someone to be a mother. And He said to them, "Here, you take this Child, you rear and you train Him -- you mould Him and you fashion Him — you guide the course of His years in the plastic age".....so Mary and Joseph acknowledged their assignment. They had no greater responsibility. They were no more nobly intentioned than this, than to fulfill their obligation to this Child.

So Jesus went down to Nazareth, He was subject to them, He was obedient to them. And Mary and Joseph fulfilled their obligation to Him, to the end that He grew up.....we have the classic expression -- "He increased in wisdom, He increased in stature, and in favor with God and with man."

Now for a moment take a look at that home to which He went in Nazareth. Some of us have traveled there, we know whereof we speak. For some of the homes in Nazareth to this very day are quite a bit like the homes in which Jesus grew up as a lad. Many of them are single-room houses, maybe a window, maybe two windows, a door....an earthen floor....at the one end of the room a raised area where the sleeping quarter was. You would not find hanging on any wall an academic degree. Whatever water was in that home was water that was gotten from the village well. The food was very simple, and the diet was much the same day after day after day. You had little if any cupboard space in which to store food against the next day....and I'm not so sure there was a closet space where clothing was hung, for I have reason to believe that perhaps for many of those people in the day of Jesus, and maybe even for Jesus himself, they had no change about them. For many people, the only clothing they had was the clothing on their backs.

I'm drawing the line as rigidly as possible against the home to which you're going to return once the Benediction has been pronounced. Of all the things that that home did not have, this is what it did have.....a father and

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a mother who considered no obligation in life of greater importance than to rear and to train their children, and to set before them a good example. That was the first Christian home.

Now we very properly ask ourselves today: when is a home Christian? Maybe it might be helpful to ask the question: when is a person a Christian? When does an individual have the right to be called Christian?

Well, to begin with, a person has the right to be called Christian, very properly so, only after he has made the decision to become Christian. The true Christian is not a person who is a casual Christian. In the Christian religion there is always the place for decision.

Now can you spill over to the theme of today's sermon? When is a home Christian? Shall we not therefore say that a home is Christian only after the decision has been made that this home shall be a Christian home, where the example of Jesus Christ is uppermost, and where His teachings become the basic philosophy for the attitude and the conduct of the people within that family circle.

I can't press this strongly enough. Maybe in the final analysis it must be said that no home is really Christian until a decision has been made that the home is going to be Christian. When is a person a Christian? -- when Jesus Christ rules his heart. And how can you tell whether or not Jesus Christ is ruling a man's heart? -- when Jesus Christ rules a man's heart, he's turned inside out, and the Christian is an individual who does not live for himself and himself alone, but he lives for others. A Christian is an individual whose life does not begin and end with himself.

When is a home Christian? -- a home, by the very same token, is Christian

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when it's turned inside out as Jesus Christ rules in the hearts of those who are there, and when the home exists for those beyond it. Candidly speaking, how much of our time, how much of our energy is being spent just for ourselves and just for ourselves alone? Many of our homes are temples to selfishness, because we begin and end only as we think of ourselves.

This must be said, my friend. Many an individual who purposes to become a Christian stumbles and falters along the way. How well we know that, because every time you and I come back to this place we begin at the same place: "We poor sinners confess unto thee - - " An individual who claims the name of Christ knows himself to be the sinner that he is, and he never bats 100% for his Lord. But the mark of the true Christian is that once he falls, he stands up again and knows the direction in which he ought to face.

Many a home that may want the label Christian may never bat 100%. God will not judge us upon the record of perfection. God will judge us on the nobility of our intention.

An individual who is a Christian is a person who has made the decision to be Christian. The home that is Christian is the home where the decision has been made to be Christian.....have you made the decision?

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Rogate. The Fifth Sunday After Easter May 19, 1968

"To Ask The Right Questions"
Text: Luke 18:36

The sermon originally planned for this Sunday morning was completed sometime yesterday afternoon; at least it had reached its final stage of preparation. So with some degree of accomplishment I turned my back on the study and in a more relaxed manner picked up a weekly news-magazine. Before I seemed to be aware of it, I had read it for the most part from cover to cover. And by that time whatever air of relaxation I had so previously known completely disappeared.

The news-magazine had, with its series of articles touching upon the varied appects of our time and of our life, quite unsettled me. It was as though I had been exposed to all the noise, the din, the clamor, the confusion, the madness of our age, in one setting.

Oh, not that the experience was entirely new! Who hasn't had some taste of it, no matter in what direction he looks these days....

...but you see, we can get up and turn off the television set

...we can turn off the radio

...we can put the newspaper down, and quickly take it to the pile with all the others that are soon to be discarded

...at the most, perhaps we have three-quarters of an hour in the car-pool, and then we get away from <u>that</u> conversation and turn our thoughts elsewhere.....

Haven't we all done this, these days?

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But oddly enough, I felt as though I was being held captive, held captive in that chair from which I did not stir until I had reached the back cover of the news-magazine. Even as I gave myself to the appointments that were scheduled for the balance of the day -- the very meaningful experience with five fine young men of this parish at Bethany, then last evening the conference with the parents anticipating the baptism of their children at this hour.....even as I gave myself to these appointments, I seemed to walk around pre-occupied, not completely free from the haunting and the stirring of the thought of thoughts that continued to lurk in my mind from that arm-chair encounter with that most recent edition of a news-magazine.

Then at 3:15 this morning -- the time I registered precisely as I turned on the light, I was awakened as one hearing a trumpet call, knowing immediately that there would be no more sleep for me (by this time I know my physical and emotional reaction to being stirred in the night)...and being somewhat annoyed and irritated that this was true, recognizing the demanding schedule of this day, and this afternoon and tonight, nonetheless I went down to my study and wrote another sermon. The sermon, 99% complete, to have been preached at this time, is set aside, perchance to be picked up at some other time. But the thrust of this impact, as though all of it now were settling in anew, prompts me to stand before you as I do now.

What did I read between the covers of that magazine?

For the sake of this sermon, I have only one word - - madness -- a world seemingly gone mad.

What else would you call it?

- - the stalemate in Southeast Asia....we're still not sure how

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we can disentangle ourselves, and how long the process may be

- - Korea still spells impasse, and who knows what the outcome of the Pueblo incident may be?

- - the Poor People's March...converging from all parts of the nation, here, in the Nation's Capital

- - the campus demonstrations...a fraction of the student body so extremely vocal, taking over, destroying even personal records, attempting to dictate policy

- - men defiantly, accompanied by women, going into an office staffed by representatives of the United States Government, going to files in which there are records for the United States Government, taking those records and burning them in a public parking lot

- - a nation so paralyzed by strikes that its chief executive officer cuts short his tour elsewhere to come home and seemingly to take control

- - toward the back end of the magazine, reference to a special exhibit of erotica, in Sweden...where on public display are Japanese posters, depicting the most intimate and the most personal of all the acts that God ever intended a man and a woman to know....and people passing by by the thousands to gawk

- - a man of the cloth, well-intentioned, leading people on the march....with an arm-band that bears the words: "Mississippi, God damn you"

- - pressing upward on the best-seller list, John Updike's book

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whose basic theme, isn't it -- wife-swapping

As I thumbed the pages of the magazine, dealing with the poverty, I could understand as I had never understood before the twin words: helplessness -- hopelessness. And by the time I put the magazine down in its entirety, I had only one word.....madness. Madness of the people on the move.

Then I remembered a favorite Bible passage of mine, one of my favorite Bible characters, a man named Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, who sat by the wayside begging there in Jericho. He was caught up in an age gome mad too. There was a shouting and a pushing, people screaming in the bazaar, children crying... ...poverty all around him....life in big chunks, life in little chunks, life in not-too-pretty chunks, life most certainly in ugly chunks.

And then one day he cries out - - there seemed to be a more-than-ordinary commotion, there seemed to be a more-than-ordinary stir, and he cried out, "What does it mean?"

I too stand before you now raising the question. What does it mean, this madness which is ours? Ah, but we're not the first to have it. You see, this is one thing we forget. Every generation has its own kind of revolution all over again, and life goes forward one generation at a time. Some thirty years ago, thirty-one years ago to be exact, a man stood up and said, "I want to refer to a book that's been written by a distinguished author of our time, Reinhold Niebehr's "Reflections On The End of An Era" - - that was the same time when Walter Lippmann was writing his "Preface to Morals" .....and both of them agreeing that something had happendd, there was a portent of a whole social upheaval, and wondering even then if there could be any sense made out of it.

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Surely you must know the anguish of my soul. For no one set aside for the ministry of the Gospel can take these days lightly. It's so easy to become annoyed, and irritated, and embittered. Who doesn't want peace? - - who doesn't dream of tranquillity? But dreaming of tranquillity and a craving for peace can be as a fantasy. The past was not as idyllic as we may have thought, if we read history correctly.....and the day that we dream of in the future may not be as ideal as we picture it. For as long as this world is populated, is peopled by men and women like you and me, stained by original sin, we'll have all kinds of tension, and tension means strife.

Blind beggar Bartimaeus might have been embittered and annoyed and irritated by all the noise, the din, the clamor, the madness of people in Jericho. He might have been craving, saying, "Even if I'm blind, let me enjoy my blindness in peace -- stay away from me!" But to the everlasting credit of blind Bartimaeus, he asked a question, and he asked the most important of all questions: "What does this mean?"

We who crave for neat little formula, we who want everything tied up in neat little packages, we who want immediate answers, may sadly discover one day that ours could be the generation that didn't have all the neat answers!- - for the simple reason that we had failed to ask the right questions.

There isn't a parent among us right now, there isn't a father or mother who does not understand what I'm about to say: when we're suddenly confronted by the explosive behavior pattern of our adolescent -- something that augers getting out of our control -- what is our initial reaction? Annoyance. Irritation. And placing the blame on somebody else.

One doesn't have to be schooled in psychology to know that it's the wise

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parent who says to himself, "What's behind this? - - why this explosive pattern of behavior?"...and then tries to deal with that. Maybe the indictment that rests against us is that we are the irritated ones, and we are the annoyed ones, but we have lost our perspective, a perspective that prompts us to ask the question: What does this mean?

> ...when there is defiance of authority -- why are there the young rebels?....and if we continue to allow them to defy authority, where will this lead?

I'm not so sure that many people caught it, and I was quite disappointed at this point, but in my book Bill Ellis's finest moment, perhaps, the Saturday night he came and spoke to us so exceedingly well, came when someone, I've forgotten who, put the question that most certainly should have been asked:

"Do you think the Poor People's March can be a useful instrument?" We taped Bill Ellis's presentation deliberately. And if I were to play that tape back for you now, you undoubtedly would be impressed by the pause, the hesitation, and then he answered by saying, "I don't know."

But what he did say was this, that maybe we'd better ask ourselves: Why a Poor People's March at all? Maybe we don't know the outcome, and maybe we don't favor the strategy, and some of us think we have a better way of dealing with it.....but the question of questions remains: Why -- this pressure? Why - this thrust?

From time to time we need to remind ourselves that we just daren't be too pre-occupied with the present. We do have a link with the past. And maybe the past can teach us something. Let me read for you this article from a newspaper:

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"It was a warm June 2, the beginning of a "long hot suffering summer.'

It was one of the largest cities of the world.

In the streets, there began, quietly enough, a demonstration on civil liberties.

As the demonstrators gathered number and momentum, it turned into a riot. For six days and nights, 60,000 rioters raged through the streets -- and through the central part of the about-to-be-collapsed center city. More than 800 persons were killed or injured.

There was an orgy of senseless destruction, plundering and looting. Jails were opened, and prisoners let out by the hundreds. The city's largest bank was invaded and pillaged. Government offices were raided.

Tens of thousands of people wandered the streets, crying 'police brutality,' and even the military were powerless to restrain them. Nearly a week later, the riot subsided out of sheer exhaustion.

Only 21 rioters were executed, and only a tiny fraction of the plunderers and burners were even punished at all.

The dates of the disaster were June 2 to 8, 1780. The city was London, England.

The demonstration was by Protestants against Catholics."

We who are caught up in this madness - - Why? Where will it lead? How deal with the cause, the root?

Maybe our indictment is that being overwhelmed with our irritation and annoyance, we've forgotten to ask the question for which Bartimaeus will be eternally remembered: "What does it mean, anyway?"

Bartimaeus got an answer. Some people thought it wasn't very precise. Other people thought it was too precise. The answer came back: "Jesus Christ is caught up in all of this." Maybe this is our task - - to find God's meaning in this, and God's way through it.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Exaudi. The Sunday After The Ascension May 26, 1968

"AND YOU ALSO"
(John 15:27)

Depending on your point of view of course, some roads lead nowhere; some roads lead everywhere. There was an old saying in Bible days that the road to Judaea led nowhere; but the roads to Galilee led everywhere.

I say it with the utmost of reverence.....once upon a time there lived a boy in Nazareth. He was a carpenter's son. He was every inch boy. He loved the out-of-doors, and on occasion He would come in and say, "Dad, Abie and I are going to sleep out on the hill tonight".....and His mother would pack Him a little lunch, and off the two of them would go....laughing, running, jumping....sleeping under the stars....

....and from their vantage-point they looked into the distance. They saw the great trade route, and the caravans, going hither and yon. Surely it made an impression upon Him - - - "That world out there -- what's it like?" Boys who grow up in small towns are wont to ask questions like that: "That world out there -- what's it like?"

When He was thirty years of age, that carpenter's son who grew up in that small town put down for the last time on the carpenter's bench the adze and the plane.....and He walked away, He became the Itinerant One, going from place to place, and always wherever He went He saw people.

Whenever He saw people, He thought of them in relationship to this world. And by this time He'd fashioned a great philosophy, that no matter what He looked upon, He had to see it from God's point of view. So He used every oc-

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casion as a kind of mounting into a pulpit, whether it be in a synagogue, whether it be at a way-side well, whether it be under of trees.....He seemed forever to be talking about things from God's point of view.

He spent three years doing this sort of thing. They remembered Him as the preacher. But they also remembered that He not only preached, He also performed. And if there was some need close at hand, He saw that it was met. He never seemed to be indifferent, or impervious -- forever identifying with whatever it was that was nearest at hand, particularly if it needed some expression of love.

And oddly enough, as they remembered Him, He never seemed to have run out of love -- always enough to go around. Surely one of the number recalled how when He was on His way to Jerusalem.....

> ...and He knew very well what was going to happen to Him in Jerusalem! -- there was the shadow of the cross.....He might have said to Himself, "And all this because I've done what I've done? -- because I've loved people? -- because I've refused to allow them to get to the place where they would make me hate them?"- - - this everlasting gracious gesture of good will on His part, <u>toward any man</u>.....
>
> ....with His rendezvous with the cross, nonetheless when He went through Jericho, somebody cried out: "Help me!" - - He might have said, "Goodness, haven't I helped enough people, and where did it get me?" -- this road to Jerusalem ....but He stopped where He was and He met the man's need.

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You remember how every single preacher we've ever had on Good Friday has told us how He used even His dying moment upon the cross to meet the need of a man nearest at hand....

> ...and ere He breathed His last He looked down at His mother, and His dying concern was that her need might be met.....

He spent three years being this kind of person. He spent three years doing this kind of thing, that is, once He had become the Itinerant.

Mark you, He had no strategy-of-sorts. The only strategy that He had was this kind of thing, if you please, as He began His itinerant ministry. He looked around for twelve people, and with all the impact of His soul, and with the full thrust of His personality, He made so great a dent on these twelve people in particular that they could not resist Him. He said, "Follow me"....and amazingly enough, they gave up what it was that they were doing, and they followed Him.

All things come to an end, apparently. God's plan for Jesus Christ, the three years, are now up. What's going to happen now? Will God just visit this earth for three years with someone as wonderful as Jesus Christ, and then say, "Now I take Him away. Here He is -- now He's gone! -- You've had a little taste of love and truth and goodness, but you won't have it any more."....Does God work like that? Of course not.

So this carpenter's son called together a band of disciples in one of the last conferences that He ever had with them here on earth, and He gave them to understand that He was finishing His earthly pilgrimage....

> ....but He also gave them to understand that all that He did was going to continue....and He said something about God coming in now

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and bridging the gap...

...something about the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth,

the Holy Comforter -- He'd take over.

And then, mark you, He looked at these people, those who had been with Him from the beginning, and He said, and this is the text for today's sermon:

> "And you also shall be my witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning."

Now whatever remains to be said in this sermon is a kind of dealing with the constant bobbing back and forth of three words, that you've already underlined, haven't you: Who? What? When?

> " - - And you also shall be my witnesses, because you've been with me from the beginning."

Who is it that says these words?

Someone the like of which the world had never seen before, who was God's investment in us at a critical, crucial period in history - - so much so that even Napoleon Bonaparte, of all people, when he remembered the life of Jesus Christ, said, "There isn't anyone who can ever compare with him." He said, "I've founded great empires - - " (I have the direct quote in front of me that I shan't read for you) - - "I've founded great empires, even as Caesar and Charlemagne before me, and we've gotten people to come after us. But how have we done it? We've done it by force. But this Jesus Christ, He's built a kingdom that's based upon the love of people. There are millions who would die in his name, in response to his love."

Now this is the taste that the world had of God, the personification of Truth and Love and Goodness. Now the three years are up. What does He say

to whom?

He says, "You're going to be my witnesses."

Witnesses? Who, me?

"Yes. You know me...you've been exposed to me...you've walked around with me, you've heard what I've had to say, you have seen what I've done.....you're caught up in this thing. Very naturally now, you're my witnesses because you are the ones who know me."

When a man goes to the witness stand, he stands there just because of his experience. He's there because he's qualified to speak because he has seen, he has heard. His testimony is valid not because it's an opinion, not because it's a judgment -- he's not invited to the witness stand to argue. He goes to the witness stand because he testifies to what he has seen and what he has heard.

Now who were they who were told that this was to be their lot in life?

I'd like to tell you that they were plain, ordinary people. I don't know that I can, that is, plain and ordinary in the sense that they took life as a matter of "take it or leave it." If they were plain and ordinary people, they were also committed people, who took Jesus Christ seriously, so seriously that they stayed with Him, that they went where He went and became involved in the things that affected Him. Now to these people He says, "You go now, and you testify -- you tell what you've seen, and you tell what you've heard."

How do you suppose we've been doing, those of us who follow in the train of witnesses -- what's been our road? In those very meaningful personal

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interviews and conferences that we have had at Bethany with the confirmands, occasionally there was the moment when I would stand with the boy or the girl, the father and the mother, and there was the parting prayer:

"Dear God, Help (Cathy) (Ingrid) always to
remember that when she first knew anything at all
about God, it was because somebody else told her."

If the world is to know anything at all about God it's because somebody has gone to the witness stand and testified.

Now how have we been faring?

From a historian's point of view, Kenneth Scott Latourette tells us that we've had our ups and our downs. It's fascinating reading to see the ebb and the flow, and it's something that we need to remember if when you read yesterday's paper you discovered that we had the highest percentage of people in recent years who honestly believe that religion no longer has an influence on society. Kenneth Scott Latourette says you can mark them off in blocks of centuries, and see how we're on the <u>incline</u> -- our influences broadened and extended. There was that period of time when we spread from the Middle-East all the way to Russia, and to Scandinavia, to China....

> ...then we had the periods of time when there was the <u>decline</u>, when even infidels took over the Holy Land. You can read for yourself, if you're a historian, how there was a period of history when Christianity almost became extinct!....
>
> ....and there are those who tell us that since 1914, the introduction of those years of World War I, we've been on the decline ever since, and that we could be living in the end of the so-called "Christian Era."

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Let that be as sobering as it ought to be. And the frightening thing, in the words of the President of our Church, Dr. Franklin Clark Fry, when he was asked "Do you think the time will come in America when we Christians will be persecuted?" - - - he immediately retorted, as only Dr. Fry can do it: "Persecute? No! Ignore? Yes!"

But having said all of that, history also reminds us that God has His precious remnant. God is never without witness. That's why once upon a time He turned to a handful of people -- only a handful of people, mark you! against the millions of that day, only a handful of people -- and He said to them: "You are my witnesses." And even Rousseau says, "Twelve men, carpenters, artisans, went out, and with prodigious effort proclaimed the name of Jesus Christ" . . . . "And you also" -- he said -- "shall be my witnesses."

With whatever sanctified imagination you may have, look upon the development of the Christian Church in this way: one succession of passage of witnesses to the stand, with God seated upon the Throne of Judgment, calling down to earth:

"Next witness, please - - next witness, please!"

....and you and I hear that call wherever we happen to be.

Wherever we happen to be.....

> ...the mother, completely worn out and physically frustrated with caring for her children, goes on loving the child...
>
> ...the seemingly irresponsible adolescent -- she happens to hear the clarion call of God from the Throne of Judgment: "Next witness, please!" -- and against that situation she witnesses patiently to God's love and truth, and does what needs to be done where she is.....

COPY

...riding in a carpool

...standing at the curb outside the bowling lane

...lifting the receiver and talking to a person

.....conversation goes on. Somewhere, somehow, someone speaks disparagingly of Jesus Christ and His Holy Church.

The President of our Church tells that he doesn't know of any institution on the face of the earth which he thinks could have continued against the wave of negativism such as we bring against the Bride of Christ which is the Church. In the course of the conversation when you're caught up with it, do you not hear the clarion call of God from the Throne of Judgment:

"Witness, please -- next witness!"

"Who will speak the word of truth in my behalf? -- who will speak the word of love?

- - - next witness, please!"

There are those who say that once you reach the age of fifty, what purpose have you in life? From the Throne of Judgment do you not hear God saying: "Witness for me -- out of your experience!" And if you have grandchildren, do you not look upon them as your second and your third chance to tell the story all over again?....."And you also shall be my witnesses."

Jesus Christ is always sending people into the witness stand. We're always being subpoenad by God, in whatever situation we find ourselves. We're always being called upon to demonstrate, if not in taking ourselves on a march, if not by carrying a placard in our hands, if not by screaming and shouting, if not by signing a petition -- He's always looking upon us to witness by our attitude, and our orientation....."Next witness, please!" ..."And you also shall be my witnesses" said Jesus Christ.

Now be patient with me, will you? I do this deliberately. You've heard me tell it to you before, but there are some things that need to be repeated. It's the recitation of a legend.

The legend has it that someone saw Jesus Christ as He was turning His back upon Jerusalem and this world and was going *away*, heading toward the Mount of the Ascension. And this man knew exactly what this meant -- Jesus Christ was ending His earthly pilgrimage. And this man knew how much Jesus Christ had meant to this world....all the love that had been channeled through His life....all the truth He had proclaimed....all the good things He had done. And he says to Jesus:

"Don't tell me you're going away. Don't tell me you're calling it quits! There's still so much to be done!"

...and according to the legend, Jesus Christ says,

"But I am going *away*."

...and again the inquirer says,

"But who will carry on this work? It can't stop!"

...and Jesus Christ says,

"But I have disciples - - " (and in the words of the text)

"They're going to be my witnesses."

...and the man asked the question that you would have asked, too:

"But what if they fail you? What if they don't do it?"

And Jesus Christ said:

"I have no other plans."

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Communion Meditation - Pastor Shaheen
Trinity Sunday June 9, 1968

"ON BEING MADE SILENT BEFORE GOD"

If it's a title you'll be wanting for the sermon, may I suggest this: "On Being Made Silent Before God." It has its inspiration from the Old Testament Lesson for today, that magnificent chapter, the sixth, of the Book of Isaiah. It's the beginning and the ending verses in that lesson assigned for Trinity Sunday:

> "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord - - "

...the final verse in the Lesson for the Day:

> "And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here I am! Send me.'"

For shame upon you, my friend, there's never so much of a ripple of reaction on your part when that lesson was read, so conditioned have you become to the imagery of the Bible that it scarcely made an impression upon you. It's a man, mark you, who is saying that he saw God, and that he heard God speak! It's Bible-talk, you say, and it doesn't faze you.

....and perchance if I were to stand here and to say to you that last night, when I came into this empty place, I sat where you now sit, hither and yon within these walls, and I thought of your coming together today, and I prayed for you.....and then before I left, suppose I were to tell you now -- I saw God, high and lifted up!

...suppose I were to tell you that I heard God speak to me - - !

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...oh, you'd probably say, that's preacher-talk, and we expect a preacher to think like that, and we're quite willing to accept the fact that he might even talk like that....

But come now, suppose someone right alongside of you, the person in front of you, behind you or alongside of you, would stand up and say,

"Equal time, Preacher, for me!" ....then as he stood up and looked around, with a far-away look in his eyes, he'd say,

"I know exactly what you're talking about. I've seen God. I heard His voice. God's been revealed to me."

...your immediate reaction might be, you'd better get an appointment, brother! There's a place where they examine folks like you.

For shame upon all of us, we who do not understand that language -- we perhaps who have never had that experience....we're the ones who ought to be examined. Because if I know anything at all about God, He is a God who reveals Himself. If I know anything at all about Him, He's a God who makes His presence felt. He's always pursuing us -- He's always saying, "Wait a minute! -- Sit down! -- Be still!"

In my ministry of twenty-eight years, I've only had three people who have ever come to me and said, "I have had a vision, Pastor, I've seen God." And when the last person spoke to me about this, she was troubled, because, she said, "When I talk this way, my friends begin to shun me."

What is it, I ask you, what is it now that we really do when we come to this place on a Sunday morning? Isn't it, now, that we come here that we might better see God? - - that we might better hear God? I'm grateful for whatever skills and talents by which He's endowed me, and I'm grateful for the energy

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that God has given me, and I'm not about to waste them, if in my ministry in this place I have not fulfilled my role as one who endeavors to usher you into the presence of God.

Ought we not to be able to say of our coming together, as that man said tho took us up to the mountain of Camp Nawakwa in the impressionable days of our youth, as he conducted that devotional service - - "I come here to find God. It's so easy to lose Him out in the world." We've come here that we might be ushered into His nearer presence, and isn't that what Communion is? - - that we might truly receive the Presence of Jesus Christ? What an oasis this is for the spirit, with all the pressure of the world on the outside, and here we get a glimpse of the eternal, we get a divine perspective on life.

But if that's to happen, then we've got to be made silent before God. George Adam Smith, that marvelous student of Isaiah, says that when we read this passage of Scripture we ought to allow a space indicating a period of silence:

> "And I heard the voice of the Lord say, 'Whom shall I send and who will go for me?'- - "
>
> ...silence...

...and after a period of silence, then the voice of the Lord's servant:

> "Then I said, 'Here am I. Send me.'"

It's the one thing that we haven't mastered in our age, the art of being quiet, made silent before God. We're the "go-generation" -- always having to be where the action is, not always asking the meaning of the action.

I don't know how it was with you, but among the moments that I spent in front of the television these last, and I say it sublimely so -- awful -- days (you know how I'm spelling awe-full days) - - I was tremendously impressed by

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the commentator, who in describing the crowds outside St. Patrick's on the evening when they awaited the Senator's body from the West Coast, again and again he referred to the fact that New York's streets were silent, a city that ordinarily bustles with confusion - - the streets filled with people outside St. Patrick's.....silent. One of the most sublime things to come out of this terrible thing, even as men stood there around the casket with heads bowed.....not speaking a word.....God Himself allowing the sounds of silence to utter His message.

Beloved, I beg you, make room in your life for a period of silence, that our perspective may be regained. James Henry Jowett, a beloved preacher, used to tell how he went to visit a shoe repairman who plied his daily task in a very narrow, small shanty. It was on the edge of town and overlooked the ocean. And he said to the shoe repairman, "How in heaven's name can you keep your sanity in this tiny place?" "Why," he said, "Reverend, when it gets so bad, I simply get up from the cobbler's bench, fling wide the door, just stand in silence, and look out there."

God reveals Himself in our moments of silence. Where there is no vision the people perish. H. G. Wells in his book "The Research Magnificent" tells the story of a man in middle-age who had started out nobly in life, and then he was completely overwhelmed by all the pressures, and the trivialities, and the frustrations. He went out one night in the darkness and simply cried,

"O God, give me back my visions!"

...my friend, that's why these doors are open - - come on in - - get your vision back - - see the thing through God's eyes.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Oddly enough, as I stood here in this moment of meditation, the thought came quickly to my mind, what he might have said had he been here last night. Once he had been in this pulpit, we would never have been contented with anything else that followed after him. He was one of God's special ones, that is, from our point of view. The text -- you'll recognize it certainly, those of you who share in the parish leadership -- it's inscribed in the walls of the Conference Room. It's the 8th verse of the 6th chapter of the Book of Micah:

> "He has showed you, O man, what is good;
> And what does the Lord require of you
> but to do justice, and to love kindness,
> and to walk humbly with your God?"

There are those who thought he was conceited. They never understood the man. They thought he was conceited perhaps because when he spoke he always spoke with authority. And I never knew him to be wrong.

He walked among us as a giant. That's the way God endowed him. But those who knew him best said that he was constantly made humble before God. It was an experience to hear him pray. We'll come back to the text again.

A personal word, please, and you'll be interested in knowing about tomorrow. The services will be conducted in what some of us believe is the finest Gothic church in North America, at least on the Atlantic coast -- St. Thomas, the magnificent church at 5th Avenue by 53rd Street. We haven't a Lutheran nave in metropolitan New York large enough to accommodate the people who will be there. St.

Thomas seats about 1600.

You ought to know these things.....

...the acolytes for the service will be men who one time served as his assistants, when he was a parish pastor of Trinity Church in Akron, Ohio...

...the preacher for the service tomorrow will be the present Pastor of the congregation that he left in 1944 to become President of the United Lutheran Church in America, Dr. Robert Stapleton....

...the procession will be a long one....

- - there will be the more than 30 members of the Executive Council

- - every synod president will be represented -- there are 32 of them

- - there's an impressive list of honorary pall-bearers, representing every shade and every complexion of Christian thought and Christian life and Christian practice....they will be winging their ways from all parts of the world, honestly now -- the Far East, that is, Asia, Europe, Africa, South America. ..one of the honorary pallbearers is one of the most illustrious figures in Roman Catholicism, the beloved Cardinal Augustine Bea, of the Secretariat for Christian Unity....others are President of the World Council of Churches.....

> ...of special interest to you is this, that President Johnson is sending as his personal representative a member of the Cabinet who is a member of this congregation. And I had the good fortune to hear the telegram, to have it read to me as it was going to the President's desk for his signature, for his authorization, recognizing this man and his worth in the Kingdom.

And now a personal word. Significantly enough, I first claimed his friendship in the chancel of a church. It was back in 1947 when I went to Lund in Sweden for the first meeting of the Lutheran World Federation. In that old church, 800 years old, the venerable Archbishop of Sweden was showing a handful of us around who happened to be there, describing for us the antiquity and the splendor of the cathedral.....and then, there was a towering figure, weighing more than 200 pounds, six-feet, three inches and more, who called me by name, and said, "Here, stand in front of me." And he guided me around in those precious moments.

You ought to know that every pastor needs a pastor, and there are times when I took to him the concerns of this parish, and sought his advice and his counsel. Surely you understand how I share these things with you.

> "He has showed you, O man, what is good;
> and what does the Lord require of you
> but to do justice, and to love kindness,
> and to walk humbly with your God?"

Last evening there were three men ordained to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments in this place. And the question was put to them repeatedly as they began their ministry: "Will you - - ?" "Will you - - ?" "Will you - - ?"

They began their ministry as this great leader of the Church ended his. God has a way of putting two questions to a man. At the beginning He says, "Will you - - ?" .....and at the end He asks, "Did you - - ?" For the God who is the Head of the Church, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is an exacting God, and who can meet His requirements?

Franklin Clark Fry endeavored to meet His requirements. He lived his years as one in obedience to a divine command. His every pronouncement was as an echo of the Eternal. I have never known a man so perceptive. I have never known a man so compassionate, albeit so exacting. He was a great task-master of us who were the under-shepherds. How he used to deride parish pastor s who would say, "But I'm no theologian" when he found out that they were not reading theology. He said, "Would you want to go to a practicising physician who had said, "But I don't read my Materia Medica." Just as he wouldn't trust a physician who didn't keep himself current, so Dr. Fry laid before us the challenge to keep ourselves current and to steep ourselves in theological thought.

He was a great churchman. He loved the Church. He looked upon it as the Bride of Christ, this Body of Christ. And how I recall once in a small group how he shared with us his anguish at those who enjoyed making, taking pot-shots at the Church - - and he's the one, you remember, I repeated it so often for you, said that he didn't know of any institution that could withstand the attack upon it except it be the Church, when people spoke so disparagingly of it. He was a great churchman.

He was a great preacher. When he spoke he spoke with authority. You had no lingering doubts. It was as though he ushered you into the very Presence of

God with his "Thus saith the Lord."

He was a great evangelist. The most stirring sermon I ever heard him preach dealt with motivating men in the church to go out and search for souls and to bring them into the Kingdom.

He honestly believed that there are four great periods in any person's life: birth; confirmation; marriage; and death. And I think that's why he knew a peculiar joy in participating in ordination services, because when he ordained a man, he knew that he was ordaining someone who would always be involved in one way or another in the four great stages and moments in a man's life. This is the good fortune of the pastor, to baptize, to confirm, to marry, and to stand in the time of death, to speak God's words authoritatively.

So Franklin Clark Fry has come to the end of his earthly pilgrimage. He who began his ministry by answering the question when it was put to him: "Will you - - ?" now stands in Judgement: "Have you - - ?" He prepared for this moment, because he knew that one day God would require from him an accounting. He knew what was good in life. He more than any other person lifted the eyes of our great church to a concern for justice, and mercy. You can't fully appreciate that unless you get your historical perspective, but for many decades this church of ours was on the periphery when it came to the concern of the disadvantaged and the impoverished and the ill-treated. We owe so much to him.

Last year I wanted to send him a birthday remembrance. What does a man send to someone who has everything? Oddly enough, I sent him a sermon, a sermon that had come to sustain my soul. And knowing him as I did, I thought he would welcome it. It was a sermon preached by James Black, the distinguished Scotsman, because I knew that the years of retirement for Dr. Fry were not far

off, and he was approaching the autumn-tide. The sermon, significantly, bore the title, "Days of My Autumn." It ended with these words:

> "Brethren, all of us have to face the autumn, if we are granted room and time. Let no man dread it, if only God is in his heart and is his help and stay. Under Him the autumn should be and is the day of fruit, the time of the yellow corn, the season of maturity and hope.
> But without God, or the presence and the promise of Jesus Christ, I can well believe that I should dread the autumn more than death itself.
> For what is any man's autumn but a grim mockery, if there be no inner harvest?"

I find it extremely difficult to believe that I, too, shall not hear his voice again, nor shall we soon see his kind.

I covet for David and I covet for Fred someone like him as they begin their years, even as the memory of his life, by God's grace, will hold me in good stead as I would end mine.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The First Sunday After Trinity June 16, 1968

"BACCALAUREATE" SERMON

Text: Luke 4:16-21

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In the months that have passed in which I was anticipating this hour that we would spend together as we observe this, our second Saint Luke annual Baccalaureate, there is only one passage of Scripture that continues to haunt my mind. It's an exceedingly interesting chapter. It deals with the beginning of a youth movement, a youth movement that began as a one-man outfit, a movement that began within the shadow of God's House. It's a story that deals with Jesus Christ...being found in a synagogue,....participating in the service.... ..having a part.....having something to say.

Let me describe it for you as best I can.

It was His habit - - you've underlined that, haven't you, it was His habit to be found in God's House. And when He came back to His home town, someone spotted Him as He neared the place. In all likelihood it was the chief elder who was in charge of the service.

Now the chief elder had the privilege of appointing someone to read the Lesson, just as I exercise that privilege in having someone read the Lessons in your behalf when you come to this place. And the chief elder on this occasion happened to spot the carpenter's son who was coming back to His home town. Word had gotten around that He was making quite a name for Himself. So he was particularly interested in assigning to Him the responsibility of reading the Lesson.

The time came for the Lesson to be read, and having been told in advance,

Jesus came forward, and undoubtedly with the utmost of reverence for God's Word, He reads from the sacred scrolls.....pulled one out of the depository, un-taped it, unfolded it....and then read a passage of Scripture. It happened to be from the book of the prophecy of Isaiah. Even though He read it, surely He could have recited it from memory, so well had He become versed in the Scriptures in the days of His youth.

Everybody had their eyes on Him - - what would He do after having read the Lesson? - - because it wasn't at all unusual for somebody having read the Lesson to offer a word or two. So Jesus, having stood up to read, as was the custom, sat down....

> ...didn't they all know Him, the carpenter's son? what would he tell us about the Scriptures? He's been traveling around a bit now, and he's gotten some kind of a reputation.....surely they were all eagerly listening.....

....and then after having read the Scriptures He said something to them that set them all agog -- they could hardly believe it.

But because, before I tell you what He had to say, let me first read for you what He read, in that setting:

> "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,
> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,
> To preach the acceptable year of the Lord . . "

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Now that's what He read. That was the passage from Isaiah.

Then the recorder in the Gospel says....

> "He closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the syangogue were fastened on him."

You see, what I've already told you in a prefatory way is quite authoritative.

> "And then he began to say unto them - -

(now this is where you and I came in)

> "And then he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

Now having told you this, there are two observations with which you and I must deal immediately.

One is, this was a personal declaration that Jesus Christ was making. He personally makes known to them that He knows that He and God have business together. That's the way William James once put it when he was trying to define religion -- that God and man have business together. Maybe the first real sign of maturity is this: that a man must recognize God's claim upon his soul, and that God speaks to a person individually and that God speaks to him personally.

In the weeks and the months and even the years that preceded this moment, Jesus Christ was having His own personal rendezvous with God, trying to figure out the meaning of life in a world that had its grievous burdens, too, in the world that had its tribulations and its turmoil. Here was a young man standing up, at the beginning of His ministry, and saying, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me.

We've never really known what it is to live until we begin to see life through God's eyes. That's why the president of that New England university was absolutely right when he says that the test of a truly educated man is the fact

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that he can mention the name God with conviction and without hesitation.

Now quite parenthetically, this is the kind of thing we've been about with you, the years that God has given you to us. We've been trying to mark indelibly upon the fabric of your minds and your hearts, in clear bold letters, the fact of God. And if this has not happened, then there's something wrong with you, because I'm bold enough to say that I know the noble intention that has characterized everything that we've tried to do in our relationship with you....

...everything that we've offered you through Saint Luke Church.....

...every time that we've asked you to gather together in the Lord's name.....

...it's because in one way or another we wanted to spell out the fact that you and God belong together, and that God has a claim upon your soul....that there can be no fulfillment in your life without reference to God.

I must say this to you -- please understand how I say it to you -- Yours is the generation that has everything! Almost anything of substance, it's within your reach. America has never had a time or an age quite like this. From the stand-point of even material things, there isn't a single one of you who wants for anything. And if you have the will for it, there isn't anything or anyone standing in your way that your life might come to its fulfillment. You are the people who have everything.

Except one thing, perchance.

And I say it quickly, perchance, because I'm not so sure that I believe it. In FIDDLER ON THE ROOF -- that most delightful Broadway musical, that's just chuck-full of sermonic illustrations.....Perchik, having fallen in love speaks these words to his beloved - - "I have something that I would die for,

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someone that I can live for, too - - yes, now I have everything. Not only everything, I have a little bit more: besides having everything, I know what everything's for!"

...and that's precisely where this reading of God into your life comes in, because only God can tell you what everything's for.

That's why you and I get into so much trouble. Because we are always tempted to read life aside from reading it through God's eyes. The most significant life that this earth ever knew was the life of One who began His ministry with His God-orientation. He began by saying, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me."

I've deliberately tried to shield you, in a certain sense, from all the unfortunate talk that's going around that God is dead! There has been gross misunderstanding with the expression. Whatever you may have read about it, whatever you may have heard about it, I would hope that by this time it's definitely established in your mind that God is, and above all else, because you know of God's claim upon your soul.

Well, this young man stood up in front of people and He said: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me - - " .....somewhere, somehow He had heard God speak to Him personally, calling Him by name, and He had responded personally.

Do you know, sometimes we despair of making public announcement, we despair sometimes of announcing things in SAINT LUKE MESSENGER, for the simple reason that people nowadays never respond to an announcement that's made generally. You could tell us from your own experience how often you've received something in the mail, and then only because we cared do we put somebody on the telephone to get through to you and to allow you to believe that we were personally interested. And whatever may be the strength of the program in this congregation, it could be

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found that because every now and then we've given evidence of a personal concern; and whenever we've failed, it's just because we've forgotten to get through to you personally. So Jesus Christ responds and says, "God's Spirit rests upon me." He responded personally.

The second observation that's quickly to be made is that having responded personally, He responded in a practical way. He outlined for Himself a program -- "Well if God and I have business together, what is that business?"...and then He spelled it out clearly for Himself. He knew exactly what He had to do, in a very practical way.

For one thing, He knew that He had to be a preacher. God will always have need of preachers, because there are times when things have to be proclaimed, there are times when things have to be said, and they have to be articulated.... ..and a great deal of the time and energy of Jesus Christ was spent in His going around preaching and teaching people. I have no idea how much of your time might be spent in talking and telling people things. But I do know that sometimes that's the way the truth has to be communicated, through words. And while we make much of the fact that a man is meant to be a man of deeds, he's also meant to be a man of words. Words can be important. Words are important.

But just as Jesus Christ also recognized that God gave Him a pair of hands, and that God also gave Him a heart by which to feel, a mind by which to think, so He gave Himself to a practical program. You can read it for yourself. It's outlined specifically as He recalled what He found in Isaiah's words.

Have you reached the stage in life where perhaps you can outline for yourself a practical program? This is where most of us get hung up. We may be led to believe that there are certain things that we ought to do. We can stuff you

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full of platitudes and generalities, but where we bog down is knowing where to begin, and what to do next.

As you know, a week ago Friday we had a memorial service in the Chapel of the Grateful Heart. A handful was present, and understandably so. Her name appears in this week's MESSENGER -- Jean Marie Mutchler.

...She attended with marked regularity the services in God's House....

...she walked around without any trumpets before her....

On Palm Sunday she was in God's House and she heard me announce that we were going to channel and funnel food and clothing to the victimized, through the disorders, the riots in Washington. I didn't get to shake her hand after the service, but I do know that by the time the 11:00 o'clock service was being conducted, there were people down in Bieber Hall who were distracted, a bit, because they heard some din and confusion in the kitchen. They were simply storing forty half-gallons of milk and an equal number of pullman loaves of bread....that she had gone out and probably bought out the store and brought them down here to give the people -- no matter how much we <u>despise</u> the thought of their being victimized, they were still hungry.

The most amazing thing that I find is that there are many people who can make all kinds of pronouncements, and attend all kinds of meetings, and fashion all kinds of resolutions, and blame <u>other</u> people..... who become quite blind to the thing that's within reach that needs to be done. Jesus Christ, tremendously impressed by the problems of His day, said, "All right -- God's Spirit is on me and I'm going to begin".....and He began where He was. I don't suppose He ever went beyond a hundred miles from His home town....

...and don't misunderstand me, I don't know that He attended very many meetings....

.....and don't misunderstand me on this part, I don't

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know that He ever marched in a demonstration, and I don't know that He ever signed and painted a banner..... ....but I know that He spent all of His energy trying to meet the need nearest at hand, and getting people on fire to do the same thing.

There are those who tell me that it can't be as simplistic as that any more. There are those who tell me that I'm too naive-minded, that I'm out of step with the "go-generation." But for the life of me, I still believe that God expects a man to begin where he is, and holds him most responsible for the need that has to be met within reach. So Jesus Christ, in His youth movement, began, began in the knowledge that He was being motivated by God to do something about the ills of the world. He succeeded so well that when somebody tried to write something about his life, about the best thing that the fellow could come up with was: "He was somebody who went about doing good."

I should be very happy indeed if some day you could sit on a Commission..... ....I should be very happy indeed if some day you could be in positions of responsibility in the United States Government, where numbered among the limited few, you'd be making decisions at the point beyond which the buck cannot go..... ....all of these possibilities could be yours.

But don't ever forget that, in the meantime, chart for yourself and map out your own personal practical program, so that when you come to the end of your journey, somewhere, somehow they'll be able to bring up as evidence that once upon a time you did say the truthful thing, and once upon a time you did perform the deed of compassion. If it happens once, then it goes on happening. It has its own motivating energy. So as your Pastor, so as your friend, so as your fellow pilgrim in the journey ahead, my heart and hand I offer to you.....

....God - - - and we, have business together.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Third Sunday After Trinity June 30, 1968

"SINNERS' FRIEND"

That introductory verse that Selmer Norland read in the Gospel Lesson for the Day ought to receive more-than-ordinary attention. I'll grant you, it's the introductory verse to what is considered by many people the most beautiful chapter in the entire Gospel according to Saint Luke. For it's that 15th chapter that deals with a God-who-comes-seeking-the-lost, those of us who would never have been found if we did not have a God who comes seeking in order that He might save. Perhaps you remember that introductory sentence, that first verse of the 15th chapter of Luke:

> "Then drew near to him all the publicans and sinners, to hear him - - "

From one war to another there are those who have passed around this bit of sentiment - - I don't know exactly where it originated. I first heard it during World War II. Then I read in a book somewhere that it had been passed around during World War I and undoubtedly it had been dealt with in earlier wars as well. Maybe you might recognize it. Let me read it for you:

> "You may be called up for duty, or you may not be called up for duty.
> If you are not mobilized, nothing matters.
> If you are mobilized, one of two things happens:
> either you are sent up to the front;
> or you are not sent up to the front.
> If you are not sent up to the front, nothing matters.
> If you are sent up to the front, one of two things happens:
> You are sent into the firing line;
> or you are not sent into the firing line.

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If you are not sent into the firing line, nothing matters.
If you are sent into the firing line, one of two things happens:
   You are hit;
   or you are not hit.
If you are not hit, nothing matters;
If you are hit, one of two things happens:
   You are dangerously wounded;
   or you are not dangerously wounded.
If you are not dangerously wounded, nothing matters.
If you are dangerously wounded, one of two things happens:
   You die;
   or you do not die.
If you do not die, nothing matters.
If you do die, nothing matters."

I've never been quite certain what to make of this reading of life. I know it's been intended to equip some people with a kind of stoic philosophy that presumably would hold them in good stead come wind or weather. But honestly now, down deep inside all of us there's something that rebels against the notion that in the end, nothing matters. Some of us honestly want to believe that in the end things <u>will</u> matter, and most assuredly we want to be on the side of the issue that matters most.

Do you know one of the crippling diseases that affects people when they are middle-aged? - - the notion that maybe nothing matters. Prior to Middle age they're on the way up. Be patient with me now, if you should take issue with what I'm saying, but maybe it's a generalization that needs to be pronounced, that prior to middle age -- on the way up -- there is such earnest endeavor to achieve that you don't much count the bruises and the hurts and the falls. You pick yourself up and you fight another day...and as you honestly believe that if you just have enough gumption, and if somehow you can manipulate those odds, your stars can still be in the ascendency.

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Then comes the plateau which is middle age. And there are those who say this is a reading of life, and at this particular point and junction they begin to run a bit scared, frightened, they become faint-hearted and timid. The hurts and the bruises that afflict us go a little bit deeper. We may, unwittingly, concern ourselves more with our hurts and our bruises than with the objective that's yet to be attained, we become increasingly aware of the pit-falls and the dangers. We of all people begin to talk in terms of risks...."Is it worth taking the risk?"

- - these are the possibilities, these are the untoward things that could happen.....

....and a lot of people who are caught up in the middle-age way of living carry around their hurts and their bruises, they walk an uncertain road, they become fidgety because they are frightened. For all of the accumulation of the results of prior failure now makes an impact, and tomorrow will be just a repetition, a little bit more of the same....so that a man in anguish cries out and says, "Is it worth it - - does anything matter?"

Why do I tell you this? Because I honestly believe this is one way of looking at that mob of people who came out to hear Jesus Christ speak. They are classified as being sinners. How do you define a sinner? You may begin at any point - - theologically, religiously - - they are the alienated ones, alienated from God, alienated from their fellow-men -- even alienated from within <u>themselves</u>!

Sinners, what are they? If you'll allow me to put it for you this way, only understand it in the context in which I share it with you, they're the ones who have made their share of mistakes, wittingly or unwittingly, delib-

erately or not. They came to a junction in the road. One path led this way, one path leads that way - - they took the wrong road! -- deliberately or not, in their unwisdom or in their folly. They have to live with their mistake. Now they're battered, now they are bruised, and there are those who go through life crying out every now and then if tomorrow will be nothing more but a little bit of the same, in the end, then, will anything matter?

There are some people who say this liturgy of ours is rather meaningless because it's much the same. To a degree we'll be using the same words in the liturgy next Sunday that we use today, even as we used them last Sunday. I for one have lived long enough that I'm willing to admit that I'm afraid life itself reads in the liturgy your basic experience and mine. For what do we say when we're hardly gathered together, almost the first words to fall from our lips: "We poor sinners confess unto Thee that we are by nature sinful and unclean - - ".....and every time we get together we're the same old miserable batch of sinners. And it may not be a very pleasant prospect, you might be ordering your life pretty much as you did yesterday. It isn't a very pleasant prospect - - and what lies ahead of us next Sunday when we come together will be no change in the liturgy, but that same honest confession: "We poor sinners - - "

Sinners are people who have goofed, sinners are people who have blundered, sinners are people who are battered and bruised, because in the end, whether we like it or not, every man pays a price for his unwisdom, or if you want to call it, his folly.

So what lies ahead? What can we expect from God?

That's a good question - - what can we expect from God? - - we who are battered and bruised and who go blunderingly through life. Well one day, as

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He had never done it before, God sent marching down the highway of life His Great Galilean, a carpenter's son, and He made it His business to seek out people. And the net result was that He became a kind of magnet, and He drew people to Him. And who were they who were drawn toward Him? - - not a very pleasant lot. For sinners are never attractive. If there were spiritual reflections turned back to us when we are in the Confession, we'd see how ugly we are, in our sins, because of our folly, because of our willful defiance of God.

The Good Book says they were sinners - - the flotsam and the jetsam of humanity, the battered and the bruised and the broken. We are to be numbered among them. But have you not gravitated towards God's House? Have you not gravitated toward this place where God's Word is to be declared? What does God have to say to us? - - aside from telling us that He will change no laws - - aside from telling us that He will never be less than a God of justice.....He tells us, "I am a God of love - - I will not alienate myself from you, but my love is so great that that love will draw you to me." Because this God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is kindly-disposed, and is always taking the initiative to prove to us that God loves us, and that the Devil was never meant to have the last word....we who are slaves of sin gather a measure of courage and understanding that the one whom we serve will never have the last word, because God reserves that for Himself.

There were those who tried to analyze the life of Jesus Christ, there were those who looked back after He had been here those three years and lived among them - - what was the meaning of it all? Then one day some chap gloriously put it this way: "Why, He was the friend of sinners."

And would you believe me if I were to tell you that there is never a time in life when the thing that we may need most is anything less than a friendly gesture, a reflection of God's eternal love. But being human as we are, it's hard to understand as it's hard to believe it. When our children, no matter what age, show themselves rebellious, the thing that they need most at that particular time in their life is our love. This is one reason why I become terribly impatient with my colleagues in the ministry, who when we have our little sessions, start deploring some of their people, the obstructionists, the ones hard-to-reach, the ones who give them a hard time.....and I say to them, "They become your opportunity! They need to be loved, not alienated." When God came into the world in Jesus Christ, He came as God's supreme loving gesture.

We have our moments when we think of small towns in idyllic ways - - - - "Those kind hearts and gentle people who live in my home town"....not always. There was a stranger who came from the big city to my home town, in the impressionable days of my youth. For a number of different reasons he was not accepted. Then one day we got the sad news that he was accused of killing a man. He was brought up for trial. He was sentenced to the Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia. I went to visit that man on more than one occasion.

After twenty years in the penitentiary he was released. They say he's been rehabilitated. I'm in a position to tell you that the only thing that made that possible, by his own admission, was the strand of a single soul to which he clutched. For Doc Miller was the town pharmacist. The convicted one used to come into Doc's drug store. Doc observed him. Then when the man's attorney scoured high and low to find some witness who might speak some

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kind of a good word in behalf of the accused, Doc Miller, with so much at stake -- after all, he was in business, Doc took the witness stand, and simply said, "His conversation in my shop was clean. I never heard him speak an ill word against anyone. Aside from what's happening in this court-room now, I know nothing to his discredit."

Please don't misunderstand me, a man was killed. None of us may ever fully know how the thing happened. But here was a man whose life was restored because at one particular time he happened to meet just one person who came forth, instilled the measure of hope.

You and I murder people - - by the things we say about them, by the things we think about them - - by the things we do to them without even raising a hand. How will this kind of murder be eradicated from a man's heart? Perchance by someone showing himself friendly, who while we are yet sinners, God came to us where we are, singing a song to which we were meant to respond.

This is a true story that comes out of the history of Tennessee.

Some Indians came and destroyed a village. They took captive men, boys, some of the women. Years later the town was re-established, re-fortified. They gathered enough strength to attack the warring Indians. They brought into the village captive Indian warriors. Some of them, two of them, had fair skin. When the commanding officer of the troops, knowing what had happened earlier, thought to himself, "Could it be that one of these, or both of these are the youngsters who were taken captive years ago?" They gave the appearance now of being every bit Indian, except for the color of their skin. Being very perceptive, the commanding officer found some of the women who said how their sons, while yet boys, were taken captive. He in-

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stilled a measure of hope...."How can we get them to respond?"

And then he came up with the notion: "Do you remember a lullaby that you might have sung to them when they were young?" And one of the mothers went up and down the line of captives singing the song -- it was the overflow from her heart when these boys were young....and lo and behold, one of them stepped forward, walked up to the woman, and responded by singing a corresponding line to the lullaby.

This is one way by which you can read the Gospel of Jesus Christ: God's Great Galilean coming on the horizon of our life, singing God's great lullaby of love.....and we in turn should respond with a corresponding line that God meant us to sing.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Fifth Sunday After Trinity July 14, 1968

- - ON GETTING ALONG WITH ONE ANOTHER

For some people, letter writing can be quite a chore. There was 19-year old friend Chuck Winter as an example. He spent the year here in the States while his dad and mother were in Kathmandu, Nepal, his father being stationed there with the AID program. A whole year passed by, and they didn't hear from Chuck at all. Not that he didn't love his parents, not that his behavior was far from being exemplary, not that he didn't have anything to write about.... ...it was simply that he was the kind of a person for whom letter writing was really a chore.

Fortunately, they did have friends in the States - - Chuck would visit them every now and then, and they in turn would write to Charles and Barbara to say that they had seen Chuck and everything was quite all right.

If it's a chore to write letters to people whom you know, think how much more of a chore it must be to write to those whom you've never met, who live in a place where you've never been. Fortunately for the Apostle Paul, that tent-mender-who-turned-missionary, went from one place to another, letter-writing wasn't much of a chore for him. In fact he fairly delighted in it. And thanks to the fact that he wrote as many letters as he did, we not only have a history but also a theology of the early church, for he was forever writing letters. He would write letters to Christians that he had met, that he wanted to nurture them in the Faith.....then on occasion he felt constrained to write letters to Christians that he had never met, and who lived in places

where he had never been.

The Epistle to the Romans is just such a letter. Now what does a man write about when he's about to write to people whom he's never met -- who live in a place where he's never been? Well, the Apostle Paul was an astute observer of human nature. Wherever he went he listened to people, he talked with people, there was indelibly impressed upon the fabric of his mind the very obvious truth, that people are people the world over. That of course is the understatement of the year.

Knowing this to be true, of course, when he wrote to these people that he had never met, who lived in a place where he had never been, he was on sure ground, particularly when he came to that 12th chapter and the 18th verse of that Letter, for he wrote something like this:

> "If at all possible, live peaceably with one another - - "

People are people the world over. And because people are people the world over, there is the ever-present problem of people learning how to live with one another. It's every man's problem, how to get along with people. For you and I were not meant to be hermitlike in our existence. God made us that we should be social creatures. But then there's always this problem of living with people and trying to manage somehow to do it peaceably.

Several years ago I thought to myself that I'd be a far more effective preacher if in the course of the week, before Sunday came, I'd spend some time visiting some of you where you work. I had a rather ambitious schedule, never fully realizing it of course. But my first stop was out on Brookville

Road. We happen to have a member of our congregation who is an inventor. He has an instrument-making shop out there. So when I went to visit him my mind was thrown in a tizzy of course, when he tried to tell me about that satellite-tracking device of his.

But then we turned to other things, and I said to him, "What really is your biggest problem?" Immediately he answered, "People - - getting the right man for the right job, and then, once you get the right man for the right job, to get these people who are here to work together, to get along with one another."

...no matter where I seem to turn, when I ask people, "What's your biggest problem?" - - invariably the answer seems to be: "People..... people.. ....people." .....

When I go back to the hills of home, on rare occasion I visit a machine shop. It's off from the beaten path, nestled against the hills, serenely clustered there, with one building, two buildings.....out in the acreage that surrounds it you may see deer come out and graze....it's a quiet place. The man who operates that machine shop is a devout Christian, and I think his policy has been to hire only those who are Christians, haply enough if they might also turn out to be good craftsmen!

...I've been told that in that little shop of about twelve people, there are two men who agnore one another - - even in a shop as small as that, and presumably where everyone is a Christian and a church member, there are two men who have never mastered the art of getting along with one another. When it comes time for the lunch break, I'm told, the one goes off in the corner of the shop all by himself, doesn't affiliate with the others, lest in doing so he might have to talk to the other chap.....and the other chap, weather

permitting, goes out in the car and eats his lunch there, and then spends his time fiddling around his car so to occupy his time, that he won't be thrust in front of the other fellow....

"If at all possible, live peaceably with one another."

This they also tell me, and didn't I know it -- it was common knowledge, of course it was.....in that small town in which I grew up, of less than three thousand people, there on the corner of Broad Street and Washington Street lived a man and a woman, a husband and a wife, who shared the same table -- and amazingly enough, shared the same bed! -- but for years, by means of some kind of diabolical compact, lived out the days of the years as though the other did not exist and did not recognize one another as a human being. This kind of a compact that they had kept them together under that roof until their only child was old enough to get out into the world by himself.....then they got their divorce.

...this problem of learning how to live with one another, it's every man's problem....people.....people.....

So this tent-mender-turned-preacher was absolutely right when he could lay down a ground-rule for behavior to people that he had never met, when he could say, "If at all possible, live peaceably with one another."

He's a realist, you say, to begin with passing this out as advice, the kind of advice that he was sure they would need. He was also a realist when he began, you see, by saying, "If at all possible...." For wherever there are people there is bound to be some kind of tension and strife. If for no other reason, then perhaps for this: because eventually there may emerge someone of sterling character, and then there will be a confrontation, particularly if the other person or other people are less than what they ought to

be, and judgment has its own way of creating strife and tension.

Beloved, even when you and I come into the presence of Jesus Christ, He who is sinless, Hewho is perfect, and we are confronted by Him - - we who are always trying to get off with a little less -- He who demands so much and we who don't want to give very much.....this tension that exists between Jesus Christ and the sinner is there.

Well you may have this kind of strife, you may have this kind of tension, and even the history of the world is the history of war. And there are those who pick up this Good Book and, as though they're going to prove their point and allow themselves a measure of freedom in their strife and justify it, and rationalize themselves out of a situation by saying, "Well, even the Bible says there will always be war and rumors of war." Well, there was the Apostle Paul who knew human nature as well as he did, and he handed out that bit of advice: "If at all possible, live peaceably with one another."

May I suggest some of the things we ought to keep in mind if this could become a reality.....

One - - why don't we begin by accepting people as they are, where they are. We are different. I'm talking now about temperament and personality. Some people are by nature and temperament effervescent....and this rubs and irritates some people the wrong way. Yet wouldn't it be a terrible thing if we lived in a community where we had to deal only with the dour and the melancholy. And yet there are people like that - - who as one man said, their lines on their mouth look more like the hands on a clock 20-after-8 when it might be much better if they looked like 10-to-2....

...the beloved preacher that I had in my home church was a marvelous person. He had had a very strange kind of personality --

> - - there are those who said of him that no matter where he went and no matter where they found him, all they could think of was a solemn occasion - -

...and there are people like that, too, by nature and temperament, by personality. Maybe a good ground-rule would be to begin by accepting this as a fact of life.

The second thing that we might do, if we're going to get along with this business of trying to live with one another peaceably, is to look for the good in one another. If I didn't like to sing, poorly as I may sing, and if I didn't like to be with people who enjoy singing, and if I didn't know full well that this whole matter of our Christian experience is enough to make any man stand on his toes and sing - - I could become a Quaker. And aside from the fact that I'd be poverty-stricken, no doubt, theologically speaking, for doctrine and the teaching of the Church, yet I suppose there would always be the compensation in the fact that they more than any other people that I know have a way of phrasing it -- they are always looking for that which is of God in every man.....a magnificent thing to say about a group of people - - always looking for that which is of God in every man.

How different our relationships with people could be if we'd begin on the assumption that there is something good and we're going to look for it until we find it, and then when we find it we won't quite forget it. I can't give you her name, but they used to tell about the woman who was a great success as a public school teacher - - a great success. And one day, upon her retirement, when they asked her to reminisce and said, "Everybody knows that you had a way with the boys and the girls in your class, and some of them turned out so exceptionally well - - would you give us the secret?" She said,

"I have no secret. But I tried to make myself believe that there was something good in every pupil, and I tried to bring it out the best that I could."

I was amazed some time ago when I had a counselling session with two people who came to see me. And one of them went speaking almost endlessly (I suppose maybe it was three-quarters of an hour)...and then I said, "Do you realize, in all the time that you've spoken, you haven't said one single good word about this person - - come now, it can't be all that bad."

...just a simple ground-rule, my friend, number two: try to look for the good that's in the other person if you're going to get along with him, or her.

Oh, I'll grant you it's not easy. Don't misunderstand me, there are some people sometimes that I wish would never show up for a meeting, because sometimes the presence of just that one person could be so disruptive. On the other hand, the absence of one person can work great ill to a meeting as well. But maybe we have to remember that we whould master the art of realizing that this is the way the person is, and look for the honest and the good trait, and magnify it.

The third thing that we might say to ourselves in trying to master the fine art of getting along with one another is to realize that J. B. Phillips in his translation of this text has something to say to us, as one involved....

"As far as your responsibility lies, live peaceably
with one another"

...maybe good old Peter Marshall, that grand and gracious person from New York Avenue Presbyterian Church of years ago, isn't he the one who said that when you get caught up with the problem of a person, make sure that you're more a part

of the answer than the problem.

And then having done that, let me suggest as another step in our interpersonal relationships, to ask God to give you the courage and the humility - - twin virtues - - the courage and the humility to take the first step to set a thing right. Where did I hear, years ago, about a man and a woman, in the early years of their marriage, who had a family spat...and the one did something that involved throwing an object upon the floor. And there it stayed, neither one willing to be courageous enough and humble enough to take the first step to set the thing right. I don't know how much longer it might have gone on if one of the kin-folk hadn't come in, as an agent of reconciliation, and took them both off the hook.

The last thing that needs to be said, if in our relationships with one another we'd only try to look upon one another as we want God to look upon us. And how do we want God to look upon us? Always favorably - - always graciously. The one thing we want from God is mercy. Did I not read somewhere that somebody said, why can't we treat human beings as we treat a vase of flowers? Here's a woman with the sense of the artistic, and she's arranging flowers for the guests who are going to arrive in her home. With great pain she arranges the flowers very carefully....and then stands in this corner of the room and the other corner of the room to make certain that the light is falling upon the flowers so that they get the maximum benefit of all the physical features of that room....that the flowers might shine forth on their own. If only you and I could take such pain and effort in trying to give somebody else the benefit of the best possible light, so that his best points might shine out too.

One of the most difficult periods in the life of the late President of

of our Church, I presume, was the last year. Dr. Franklin Clark Fry once told me that he found himself praying on many a morning that God would give him enough courage to get out of bed and face another day. Leadership pays a terrible price. You see, it's the sport to be disrespectful of leadership and authority. It's part of the sickness of our day.....

...and one of the things he told me was, attending a conference between black clergy and white clergy, and just to show you the mood and the temper of the day, he was given to understand that when he attended that conference he was to listen - - and only after they had spoken would he be given a chance to speak.....how sick can we become, when we can be so disrespectful of leadership.

Well, one of the most salient things that I think Dr. Fry said in recent years came out of that confrontation. He observed somewhere, as I read the transcript - - it doesn't behoove any of us to look for perfection in his brother. Yet this is what you and I are always doing. We have a way of putting ourselves down in the center of the universe and looking upon things through our eyes as we think they ought to be, and looking at things that ought to be done the way we think they ought to be done, forgetting all the time, of course, that maybe our way isn't the only way and not necessarily the right way. This is one of the lessons that some of us have to learn. It doesn't behoove any man to look for perfection in his brother, so therefore this bit of advice, my friend - - "If at all possible, live peaceably with one another." .....and to guarantee it, try to look upon another person as you want God to look upon you.

Now, quite parenthetically, let me offer you this, one of the finest bits of advice that I have ever been given - - it's not easy to remember, and I find

muself in trouble when I forget it - - - is that sometimes you have to work around people, which is only to say that you have to accept them as they are, and make allowances for any number of things.

Another bit of advice I'd like to give you.....my friend Charlie Winter who has been with responsible government posts all over the world, living in strange situations with strange problems, a marvelous person.....and I said, "Charlie, tell me, have you ever found yourself in a situation in which you felt that you couldn't quite be equal, and particularly when it came to handling people (and I use that word in the best sense)?" "Of course," he said, "I've had my problems with people. But every time the problem in a person arises I look upon it as a challenge." ....keep that word in mind -- "as a challenge."

Now I want to tell you a story. It's highly imaginative. I'm indebted to G. K. Chesterton for it. With that marvelous mind of his he tells the story about, suppose you were floating through the universe, and then you hover over earth, and then somehow you are released and you're dropped right down in somebody's back yard, or front yard, as the case may be.....you've never been there before, you know nothing at all about this place...and inside there are people, and your secret order is that you're to go inside, and these are the people with whom you're going to live, and you've got to get along with them. Well, says G. K. Chesterton, that's a reading of life. Life's like that. You and I are thrown with people, and we're told to get along with one another! - - a challenge.

Well, my friend, dare I make bold to read the mind of God in this way: this is God's challenge to us! God made us. God put us here, within circles,

with whom we've got to live. God says, "Get along with each other." The wonderful thing is that God honestly believes that we can! That's why every now and then He raises up a person who proves the point completely, and gives us the supreme example of how it can be done.

And because God believes it can be done, and because God also knows that we're human beings, He offers us a help - - He empowers us by the Holy Spirit. You know something? We bog down because we forget this, that we can't get along with each other by ourselves. We've got to have His help.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Sixth Sunday After Trinity July 21, 1968

- - ON THE NOW OF SALVATION

The schedule of having catechetical classes on Tuesday afternoon when school is over is not for us the best of all hours of the day, surely not for the youngsters themselves, but we adjust ourselves to the fact that this seems to be the way it ought to be. It's not an easy thing to maintain their interest, you see, because any number of those seventh-graders and eighth-graders, and ninth-graders as well, are up by quarter-to-seven in the morning and off to school at an early hour. Then we get them at the fag end of the day.

But invariably there is one period in the class session when they would seem to come to life, and that was when we were able to offer them the question-answer period. If the teacher was distraught, thinking he wasn't holding their interest, then suddenly at that period he might discover that some were listening. It had this gratifying aspect about it.

Significantly enough, some of the questions that they asked, they thought they were raising the questions for the very first time, that no one ever before them had raised a question such as this. Some of the questions that you and I ask are questions that men and women in every generation before us have been asking. I shall not recite for you the whole catalog of questions that came out of this year's class, or last year or the year before that, but there is one that keeps bobbing back and forth on the horizon of my mind that I'd like to share with you now.

It's been some time since when the question was asked, and as I project

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a great deal of my own phraseology in it be patient with me, but the substance of the question is theirs. And it went something like this:

> Pastor, since God is good, and since God is a God of love of love, and since He wants to save everybody, why do we have to be good right now? Why can't we believe that in the end, no matter what we've done - - and you keep telling us that He's always forgiving us our sins.....why can't we believe that in the end He'll just come through, forgive everybody, save everybody?

...not bad, is it? Rather attractive,

and very appealing.

Why not have it made to that extent, that whatever you and I do in the present moment doesn't matter because in the end God will come through and save everybody? There are some people who believe this so fervently that they formed a denomination all of their own. I'm not too well versed with all of their tenets. They call themselves the Universalists, and I'm given to understand that one reason why they've chosen that name is not simply that they want to be recognised universally as a group, and that they want to appeal to all classes of people universally, but they also have the notion, so I'm told, that salvation is a universal thing, and that in the final analysis everybody's going to be saved.....nobody's going to be lost....nobody goes to hell. A rather convenient notion, and surely it does have its appeal.

So these youngsters confronted me, their teacher, with the question . . .

> "Pastor, if God is a good God, and since God loves everybody, and since you told us He forgives us and we ask Him to forgive us, why can't we in the meantime do just what we want to do, believing that in the end He's going to save us?"

If I remember certain passages in the Old Testament correctly, both in the Psalms and passages in the prophetical writings, there were people even in that day who had this kind of very convenient notion about God, permitting them-

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selves to believe that no matter what happened, God in the end would stretch forth that long hand of His — no place where it couldn't reach, and never weak, always strong enough to embrace and to save. In fact, they had even passed this word around about God. When people asked what kind of a God this God was, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, they said, "Well, He's this kind of a God - - He takes care of His own. We're His chosen people. He works miracles in our behalf....He's our protector, He's our provider - - "

...which is true, of course.

But then they got a diabolical twist to this thing, and in some of their prayers they even allowed this kind of thing to creep into their intercessions ...as much as to say, God, in the end you've got to save us because of the fact of your reputation - - the rumor's been spread that you're this kind of a God, that you look out for us - -

...and you can even find some prayers in the Old Testament where these people very fervently pray to God that they should be delivered on the basis, and the basis alone, that God's reputation was at stake! - - "God, for Your name's sake, get into the act. Get us out of this mess - - "

> "Pastor, if God is a good God, if He loves everyone, and if you tell us He'll forgive us our sins, He wants to save us, why can't we in the meantime do what we want to do?"

(quite parenthetically I'd add, "enjoy one's sinning - - ").....nice work if you could do it.

The person who wrote the words that were read as the Epistle Lesson for the Day, that man Paul was a tent-mender-turned-missionary, and when he was

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writing to certain Christians who lived in Rome he discovered that this was the kind of thing that prevailed in their congregation. There were some people there, even though they took the name of Jesus Christ, who were saying among themselves, "Well, let's throw in the sponge as far as being good is concerned." They wanted to believe that in the end God would save <u>them</u>, so therefore they would be free to do what they wanted to do in the meantime. The present moment doesn't matter, because in the final moment God steps in and saves everybody.

Now there might have been different reasons why they came to this kind of a conclusion, faulty as it is -- let me establish that very clearly, not to be trusted.....they may have come to that conclusion for several reasons:

One, they looked around and discovered that there were other people who weren't Christian, who weren't trying to be good - - and they got along fairly well! And they happened to remember the times they tried to be good and they didn't fare too well. So if life could turn out like that today and tomorrow, then why spend your energy, why give yourself to this whole business of trying to be good?

...and maybe they were the kind of people who had tried so hard that they were getting tired of it. They had their frustrations. The people they were trying to love just didn't love them in return. And even though they didn't have the benefit of psychology and psychiatry, they knew human nature well enough to know that when they were relating and when they weren't relating, even within the Christian family. And so in all likelihood certain numbers of them were prone to say, well what's the use? why work at this business of trying to be good today? I'll take my chances, and in the end God will take care of me.

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I submit to you that it's risky business to gamble from our point of view on any end, thinking that it's always going to be weighted in our favor. Even from a human point of view it's risky to do it in the matter of religion. Even from the human point of view it's risky business even to do it as a matter of the Christian faith. There happens to be a Hill called Calvary - - it is a matter of historical fact that one day Jesus Christ was here on earth, He did love people completely and perfectly, He always tried to treat them from God's point of view. You know how it turned out for Him. Seemingly, this side of thr Resurrection Garden, it didn't turn out too well.

How well the Apostle Paul knew it. You may read it for yourself -- he was beset in life. That we might get some kind of an understanding about his bewilderment and confusion and frustration, he called it a 'thorn in the flesh', pesky, persistent. And he tried to believe that God would take that thing out. He probably reasoned this way: "God, I could preach far better sermons for you if I'd just get rid of that thorn - - God, I could reach more people effectively, I could deliver the goods for you in no uncertain way - - if I just didn't have to think about this impediment." .....The Apostle Paul says, "I prayed and I prayed, and I prayed, but the thing still stayed there."......from a human point of view, it didn't turn out all right.

Paul Scherer shares a reaction to a sermon that he once heard preached that I presume touches pretty much upon this theme, this risky notion that in the end life always has everything turning out all right. It's a story that's related to the coast of England.....and in this sea-faring town the word had come that there was a shipwreck. Stalwart sons of the sea to the

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rescue, down to the shore they go. Among them is Charles. And as he is about to get into the craft that will take him out, hopefully to rescue those who are being wrecked, he is embraced by his mother. She cries on his shoulder, she holds him back - - "Charles, you can't go - - your father was lost at sea - - last year your brother William went out and we haven't heard from him since"....making it very plain that this could be his fate as well, and as much as to say to him, "How can you do this to me?" Stalwart son of the sea, he disentangles himself from his mother's grasp and goes out into the darkness...

...so they wait on the shore by the eerie lights of the fires they had ignited to keep them comfortable and also to serve as a beacon. And hour after hour they wait until, amid the din, the noise of the waves, they catch snatches, a voice coming out - - "Mother, we're coming in - - I have William with me."

Paul Scherer says it's a good story. He said, in fact, it's too good a story. He says, "I almost wish that the William part had never been added, because somehow there was a glow in the story without this." The glow of the story was that Charles was willing to go out, not knowing that he might return, - - Charles was willing to risk being brave and loyal to the best that he knew, without any guarantee that it might pay off as handsomely as the story did.

During the war years, didn't they tell me the motto of one of the Service groups, the Coast Guard:

"You've got to go out,
But you don't have to come back"

It's risky business to believe that life always returns the glorious dividend.

So I would say to the boys and girls in the catechetical class, and I would

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say to all of you who ask similar questions: Since God is good, and God is going to turn out everything all right in the end, why can't I do just what I want to in the meantime? - - -

Well, answer number one: You don't always have the assurance that it's going to turn out the way you think it ought to, the way you'd like to have it turn out.

Another reason is, that if ever a man allows himself to live today on the basis of such a philosophy he can be prone to live it on lesser motives, because he's inclined to think that the only thing that matters is today. And that's the damnable thing that's gotten hold upon the younger generation now. Without their being made aware of it, when they trip themselves up they trip themselves up because they have no sense of history, no roots in the past. For some reason or another, they fail to see that today is to be lived against the frame-work of tomorrow. When you glue yourself to the present moment and the present moment alone, and isolate it from yesterday and tomorrow, you end up with an "Eat, drink, be merry, for tomorrow we die - - so what?"

The Apostle Paul, troubled by these people in Rome who had raised such a question and were living their lives on such a philosophy, says to them, "But let me tell you something. Once upon a time there was someone named Jesus Christ. He came into this world, lived out the days of His years, took upon Himself all of the sins of mankind and lived the present moment always on the basis of eternity." "Now," said the Apostle Paul, "My advice to you is that you don't throw your life into neutral, that you become alive, alive unto Jesus Christ, alive unto God!".....which is simply one way of saying,

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"You live the present moment on the basis of eternity - - you live the present moment on the basis of how it's related to the purposes of God".....as much as to say, any moment, then, becomes a matter of life or death - - any moment. For the present moment does count. For eternity is the accumulation of the present moments.

Tonight, God willing, I shall stand in the pulpit of Saint Paul's Lutheran Church in Cumberland, Maryland, and have the great responsibility to deliver the charge to a young man who is beginning his ministry as an assistant pastor whose primary responsibility in these early years will be to direct the lives of young people. By the grace of God I shall do my best to lay upon him that his is the ministry to the NOW generation, and the Christian interpretation of now is that today does matter, and it counts only as you see it through the eyes of Jesus Christ and that the purposes of God may be fulfilled.

I want to close with a simple story. It's the story of The Three Devils.

...The Master Devil, in his kingdom below, says, "I think it's high time that we sent somebody up there to those people to unsettle them and get them off base. We can't afford to let them get beyond our grasp. The new day calls for a new approach."

....so he waited for volunteers.

One devil steps forward and said, "Send me up. Let me go to those people. I think I know what to do. I'll go up and tell them there is no God. That will throw them for a loop!"

The Master Devil said, "I'm not so sure I'll send you because I don't think that will do it.

The second devil volunteered and said, "Send me up there to those people. I think I have it."

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"Well, what are you going to do?"

"Let me go up and tell them that there is no hereafter. That ought to do it."

The Master Devil, knowing us so well, shook his head and said, "No, no use banking on you. I don't think that will do it."

The third devil volunteered, "I have the sure-fire method," he said, "Send me."

And the Master Devil said, "And what's your technique?"

He said, "I'm going to go up to those people and I'm going to tell them three things. I'm going to tell them that there is a God - - then I'm going to tell them that there is a hereafter - - and the third thing I'm going to tell them is, that they can take their time believing it, that they don't have to be in any hurry about practising it."

That's the problem, my friend, yours and mine too. We believe in goodness. We believe in truth. We believe in love. We believe in God.

.....but we don't have to be in any hurry about doing anything about it. Maybe that's why someone has said there's a sign over Hell that reads like this: FOR THOSE WHO FOUND THAT IT TURNED OUT - TOO LATE.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Ninth Sunday After Trinity August 11, 1968

" - LIKE AN OLD MAN RUNNING"

The days were bad enough, but the nights were absolutely horrible. During the day, however, he could keep himself busy....there were the chores that he could still do, and these helped to occupy his mind. But when night-time came, the ache was fairly intolerable. The old man would eat his evening meal, never with a fair degreee of satisfaction. And when perhaps he had put aside the last uneaten portion, he got up and followed his nightly ritual. He walked to the end of the lane, and he stood there thoughtfully and searched the horizon, hoping to see some form in the distance he might recognize.

For years ago, as you readily recall now, thinking of the Gospel lesson for the day, that young rebel of a son, presuming to know so much more than his father, or anybody else as far as that mattered, simply had to have his way. He was the willful one - - he was rebellious.

So his father gave him his fortune, and said, "There it is." Surely he could not find it in his heart to say " - - now go!" The son went off. There was no word. Day followed day, week followed week, month followed month, year followed year.....and always the ache in the old man's heart - - "Where is he? - - what's he doing? - - what's happening to him?'

You know, one day somebody very foolishly asked what could be classified as ~~the unforgettable question~~, the unforgivable question, to a mother: "Which of your children do you love most?" Oddly enough, she answered quickly, "Which of my children do I love most? - - the one who is farthest away from home until

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He gets back....which of my children do I love most? - - the one who is sick until he is well. So the question might have been put to that old man: "Which of your children do you love most?" Not that he shortchanged any of them, but surely he would have answered, "That reckless one, that rebellious one, that wanderer - - " . . . maybe he never quite got around to using the word prodigal.

But one night when he stood there with the ache in his heart, and he did discern as a speck on the horizon and he stood there and he could not go back to the house.....the nearer the form appeared - - could it be? - - could it be? - - but lo, as he got near, scarcely recognizable, yet with some sign of evidence, it was! And the old man began to run.

Now this is the text, the 20th verse of the 15th chapter of Luke:

"And he arose - -

(that is, he, the reckless one, the rebel, the wastrel)

" - he arose and came to his father

(...headed back home)

" - and when he (the father) saw him, while he was yet a great way off, he had compassion, and ran - - "

This is an unforgettable picture that Jesus Christ painted of God - - an old man running.

Men have always wondered what God is like. The question of questions isn't whether there is a God - - make no mistake about it, that isn't what bugs people. God has His own way of leaving enough evidence around that reminds men and brings to their understanding something of His creation, something of His redemption, and if they're sensitive enough, something of His sanctification. The question of questions isn't, Is there a God? - - the

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question for many people is - What's He like?

He's been pictured in many ways:

- - Good Shepherd - - Judge - - Lord - - Creator

...every now and then Jesus saw fit to lay in front of people something that would give them a clearer understanding of the nature and character of God. (And quite incidentally, let me tell you now, that as you may know, the practice of this one preacher who happens to be yours is to schedule his series of sermons for September to June before he takes a vacation. And anticipating what could be ahead from this pulpit September to June, the series of sermons now more than ever will deal specifically with the nature and the character of God.)

....this is the thing we need most. Wittingly or unwittingly, in recent time we've talked a great deal about man's ingenuity, and man's creative skill, and we've even glorified man's attempt to set the world upside-down on a Monday morning, if not by noon, then certainly by ten o'clock. But many of man's efforts are aborted for the simple reason that we fail to take into account the motivation that comes to our understanding of what is the basic nature and character of God himself. So as I, your Pastor, would challenge you,, to rush out into the world and witness for God and to claim it as God's world, and to busy yourself with such endeavors Monday through Saturday - - hopefully on a Sunday morning, when you come here, you have portrayed for you again the nature and the character of the God whom you must serve in that world. Because if it's His stamp that you want to put upon it, and if it's His stamp that you want to see, then you've first got to begin with understanding the nature and the character of God.

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So Jesus Christ, Lord of the Kingdom, came telling people what God is like! How much of His time He spent simply telling them stories. He'd weave a tale - - from Sunday School days we learned to call them parables - - then He'd paint in bold and clear lines the hero in the story...and then He'd say, "This is what God is like - - " Remember?

"This is what God is like: - - He's like a good and a faithful shepherd who never betrays His own - - "

"This is what God is like: - - He's like an undiscouragable sower who has seed, and He sows it anywhere and everywhere, honestly believing that somehow there could be a return - - "

"This is what God is like: - - He's the supreme optimist - - "

"This is what God is like: - - He's a seeker-after-souls....He's looking for something that's lost and He never gives up - until He finds it - "

"This is what God is like: - - He's like a father."

What's the hero in the Gospel lesson for the day? The hero is the father. But there are many kinds of fathers. Do you remember what Martin Luther used to intimate, that he could never quite say the "Our Father", that is, he could never quite in the Latin ritual pray the Lord's Prayer, because his father, Hans Luther, was a very unbending kind of person, very rigid, very demanding, and seldom if ever showing a measure of compassion.

God is like a father? But the question of questions remains, what kind of father? So Jesus one day told that story, about a waiting father, a longing father, a father with an ache in his heart. And then He painted

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for us in the text -- get it now, the picture of an old man running: "God's like that."

Oh, you'd much prefer a more romantic characterization? - a much more refined characterization? Is there anything more awkward than an old man running? He runs in such an ungainly fashion, and he never can be quite certain of his staff, and he simply moves all over when he runs. It's not a very attractive characterization. But I tell you, it's an apt one, and so Biblical, too.....

> "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion and ran - - "

God is like an old man running.

I told you I was completely intrigued by the text, and by these intimations. I don't know how long you have to live until you can appreciate a text like this. Maybe some have to live a little bit longer than others. Folks who have never had a concern for a wayward son can't possibly know the meaning of this text, not that that happens to be my fault, but I've listened enough in the confession to know what I mean by this, and what you mean by it.

And I don't know how long some of us will have to live until we recognize what we ought to recognize, that whether we like it or not, most of us have spent some time in the far country. And each of us does have his rebellious streak, and each of us does stand condemned by his wilfullness.

I'm intrigued by the text for the simple reason that when the wastrel son came back, unattractive as he was...the youthful flush in his cheek gone....his body diseased, and not much left of him - - - I am intrigued by the fact that the old man ran, even with whatever strength the old man had

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left, to make sure that the wastrel of a son got all the way home.

He ran to encourage him, to give him to understand that he was welcome, that he had something to come back to. This is the shameful thing for many people, that they've wasted their lives in the far country, and when they do come to their senses, there's nothing to come back to. The supreme word in the nature and the character of God as revealed to us in Jesus Christ is that God is never less than love, and that we may desert God, but God never deserts us, that some of us are old enough to admit that we've had our pages of bad experience in life. Isn't that what you tell me when you sit with me in a confessional-of-sorts? - - isn't this what you and I say when we admit in the presence of other people, as with a collective voice we tell God that "We are by nature sinful and unclean - - "? And what is sin but to be alienated from God, to be separated from Him. And separation is to be found in the far country.

And with all the ardor of my soul I tell you this, that if life has taught me anything - - if you've taught me anything - - if my own experience has taught me anything, there does come a moment when sin becomes intolerable, and eventually we get fed up to our necks with our wickedness. And by the grace of God who is always calling to us, we are motivated to turn back. This is an unforgettable picture that Jesus Christ gave of God: He's the great recaller. How it fares with you I don't know, but I must admit there's a measure of delight in my soul when I discover that in this book of hymns which is ours they did see fit to include an old Gospel hymn. And maybe our purpose would be better served if at this point I stopped and I allowed you to sing it - - "Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling, calling to you and to me . . . . softly and tenderly Jesus is calling - - come

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home! - - - come home!"

This is a picture of God. We can always come home to Him. But the decision has to be ours, and once we've made the decision He wants us to understand, even as an old man running, He comes to give us the encouragement. And there are those who have told me that the thing that they may need most in life is encouragement in the last lap.....encouragement in the end.

But let me tell you this quite frankly, there are those who tell me that this is not a good reading of life. They say, that's the trouble with you Christians, you're never realistic enough. You paint these wonderful pictures, but they're not true. There are those who tell me, and you may read it in certain books, that the most powerful force at work in the world is evil. Every Sunday when we come to church, by the grace of God there are those of us who spell the lie to that.....rooted and grounded in what lies in this Good Book, we tell you that the most powerful force at work in the world is the force of love. Evil, while it is powerful, is only second in its force. Love in the end conquers all.

But there are those who say it's folly to encourage people to believe that in the end they can be loved, and welcomed. And maybe for some people the lamentable thing is that there isn't anything to come back to. There's a novel that perhaps you've never read. I don't know that it's been published in this country. You'll be fascinated by the title - -- it's called "The Secret Woman." It deals with a triangle. But the author concentrates upon two in the triangle, the unfaithful husband and the wronged wife. I suppose a subtitle for the book could be: "The Blizzard of Events." Let me tell you a little bit about the story.

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It's the day of a great blizzard. Now you focus upon the two characters, the wayward husband and the wronged wife. They are inside while the blizzard is raging outside. He's standing by the window....there's the roar of the storm, and the din. Almost in an inaudible fashion she does get herself around to tell him she forgives him....but because of the storm he doesn't hear her. A little while later he walks outside to the well to get some water that they must have. Despite the storm, she follows him, for some unexplainable reason. ....and in the face of the storm she doesn't see the tears in his eyes...and against the noise of the storm she doesn't hear him say to her his confession. She could only see that his lips are moving and she believes that he's mumbling, as he was wont to do when he was agitated. Completely distraught and impatient, she hauls off and she hits him....he loses his balance....he falls into the deep well to his death.....

...there are those who tell us that that's the reading of life - - that no matter how nobly intentioned we may be, we're always frustrated and thwarted in the end.

This, beloved, is not the reading of life through the lens of Jesus Christ. There's always something to come back to, there's always someone waiting. An unforgettable picture of God: - - like an old man running -- "Come home! - - come on home! - - "

That's what God's like.

Would you believe me, we who have the image of God are meant to be like that. How many people - - for how many people would you give what could be the last measure of your strength, to run, to greet - - to welcome?

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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R.S.

Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Tenth Sunday After Trinity August 18, 1968

CHRIST AND THE CITY
(Luke 19:41-47a)

Few things can shake a man to the very depth of his soul as wandering around amidst the ruins of a city, to stand where once there had been life and see nothing but devastation. There was that time I walked around in Warsaw. Ninety percent of the city had been totally destroyed, as though you were to go from this place right now, and nine-tenths of everything that you would see leveled to the ground. It was particularly true of the Jewish quarter. They came there with a vengeance, and I'm about to tell you that you'd be lucky if in those days when you walked among the ruins, if you could find two bricks still stuck together by any semblance of mortar....so vicious, so complete was the annihilation there.....

...those twenty years ago when I walked where a village had been - - Lidice, not far from Prague, where they had sworn complete revenge, so much so that when they had done their worst they brought in horses, plows, turned the debris underneath and planted a corn field - - "This place shall be blotted from the face of the earth - "

...it's an awesome thing to stand and see nothing but the ruins.

Centuries ago there was a carpenter's son who stood outside a city, impressed by the magnificence. And He was moved to tears. You'll find the record of His reaction in the Gospel for this day - -

"And seeing the city, he wept."

And the Biblical recorder goes so far as to tell us exactly why it was that He cried. He said something like this:

> " - If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.
> For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side.
> And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation - "

So Jesus Christ, standing and looking down upon a city in His day, began to cry. And we have the reason for His tears.

Incidentally, what He prophesied came to pass within forty years, and should you be a traveler in Rome today, your tourist guide will take you to that part of the ancient city where he'll give you some semblance of an ancient Roman roadway, he'll show you some semblance of an ancient Roman aqueduct, he'll also show you not only the Forum, but if you want to see it - - there it stands! - - the Arch of Titus, commemorative of the fact that in 70 A.D., within forty years after Jesus had spoken these words, Rome sent her legions and did exactly what Jesus Christ said was going to happen. Jerusalem was leveled to the ground - - hardly one stone left standing near another, destruction was that complete.

So Jesus Christ, beholding the city, weeps. The Biblical recorder says he lamented the fact that this should be the fate of Jerusalem. Not because He himself was personally involved - - He had reason enough for that! You ought never to forget and you can make whatever you want to make of it - attach whatever significance you feel constrained to attach to it - - - it was

the city that put Jesus Christ to death. And His last spoken lament, His last seemingly great concern before they tried Him and put Him to death was for the city. Ah, not that evil isn't rampant everywhere! - - the force of evil was so great that it drove Him from Capernaum, the force of evil was so great that there were those who had hardly a good word at all to say about His home town. But there is an evil that becomes the cities. Now Jesus Christ, having come from a village, turning His back upon Bethany, looks upon the city and He cries. He cries because He is absolutely sensitive to the forces at work within that city that will bring about its destruction.

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There are several things that command attention at once. If you had your pencil in hand you could underline the verses of Scripture and then take it from there - -

"And when he came near, he beheld the city"

...that means He actually saw it, that means He actually felt it - - that means He actually identified himself with all that was within the city. It's amazing how often many of us travel through a city and never really see it. I do not speak disrespectfully - - He was a small-town man, you know, and He spent the greater part of His life in villages, and He seemed to shy away from metropolitan areas, as though He knew that one day what did happen would happen (you can say that quickly if you want to, but not necessarily so)....and being a small-town chap, He might have beheld the city and said - -

- - what is that to me? they have no claim upon me
...I don't make my living there...we hardly ever
got an order in Nazareth from Jerusalem....I don't

go to church there very often....I have little to do with the city. My concern is elsewhere - - -

Ah, but you can't read it that way:

"He beheld the city"

...that is to say, it made its claim upon Him.

Beholding the city, He was sensitive to the forces at play, and He recognized the evil that was at work. Now as you read the passage of Scripture, this Gospel for the day, and you have that pencil in hand, you ought to underline very heavily what He said:

"If thou hadst known the things which make for thy peace - -"

Tell me honestly, what did this man from the small town know that they didn't know? What was He constrained to believe, with all the ardor of His soul, to something that could alter their course? - - so that He needed not have prophesied as He did, and that the prediction would not have come true

"If thou hadst known, in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace."

Sensitive as He was to the evil in men's hearts, this is what He did. His own beloved people, God's chosen ones, dwellers in Jerusalem, were being victimized. They were, if you please, under the heel of the oppressor, they were the occupied. In the course of time, quite understandably, a fanatic nationalism began to dwell within the heart of the Jew. He began to think of his identity and of his identity alone. He began to dream of what could be his power, and his eminence. And fervently he hoped that the day would come when he could rid the oppressor from off his back.....and in the meantime, to keep that dream

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alive, he fed his heart on hate. Jesus Christ was aware of this. How they despised the Romans, how they despised anybody who sold out to the Romans, how they despised any Jew who was a Roman's man. Go ahead and translate that into terms relevant to today.

He also recognized the fact that these Romans despised the Jews. They had such peculiar beliefs about themselves! They had such strange patters that characterized their culture. Of all the people that they had ever dealt with, these Jews were <u>different.</u> The Romans despised them. This was what Jesus Christ sensed - - hate-filled hearts in all the people who dwelt in the city. They hated one another.

The lamentable thing is that it need not have been that way. So one reads on in the Gospel lesson for the day - -

> " <u>- If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes - -</u> "

...can this be true? Is there a time when it's absolutely too late? Christina Rosetti, in one of her writings, has this very telling line when she deals with the saddest words....

> ...and before I tell you what Christina Rosetti says of the saddest words, what do you think are the saddest words? - - the saddest words that can ever be spoken? - -

Christina Rosetti suggests three sets:

- - <u>it might have been</u>
- - <u>no more</u>
- - <u>too late</u>

This is precisely what Jesus Christ, the carpenter's son who came from a small

town, is saying when He looks upon a city - -

..it might have been different.....now, no more....now it's too late

What did He know that others did not know?

He honestly believed that if men allowed their hearts to be ruled by love, and He honestly believed something as daring as all this, that any person, whatever his condition of servitude, ought never to be seen as anything less than a human being. He honestly believed that.

But the city, you see, is the teeming mass. The city forgets to look upon people as persons. You visit a city...and someone is stricken ill, he collapses on the sidewark, on the curb....everybody pushes right on by. No one is ever seen as a person. I can't remember the name, but they've just produced an interesting film study of what happens in Grand Central Terminal. If I recall it correctly, there had been a wildcat strike called ever so suddenly - - no prior announcement. People are going down the stairs to get on the train, which I can tell you, just doesn't come. The people who go down find out that the train isn't going to maintain its schedule...and they turn around and come right back up. So the film seems to go on endlessly....a group going down within sight of the others coming back. Those going down and those coming back completely ignore one another. Those coming back have no obligatinn, seemingly, to say anything whatsoever to those going down...

" - - it's no use - - the train won't come - - "

...and those going down seeing those coming back do not feel constrained to ask any questions whatsoever of those on the opposite side.....no seeming concern whatsoever for another person, for his state and his condition.

This is much more so where people are packed together, and there's a teem-

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ing mass. Jesus Christ, beholding the teeming mass in the cities, sees the force at work within the hearts of people and allows them to look upon one another without any compassion whatsoever. Now He says, "It's been going on so long - - if you only would have known, but now, it's too late."

He was a realist, I tell you. He knew full well the might and power of Rome. He knew that one day the mighty oppressor would come down with his vicious heel. And that's exactly what happened.

Why not make it as relevant as you possibly can. Ask God to give you a sanctified imagination, ask God to enable you to picture Jesus Christ looking down upon the cities of our land, looking upon the cities of the world, today. When Fred Reissig, a member of this congregation, was the very able Executive Director of the Council of Churches of the Metropolitan Area, one of the first things he put into his office was that artist's interpretation of Jesus Christ beholding the city of Jerusalem.of Jerusalem....

...picture Jesus Christ beholding the cities of our land, the cities of the world today....

...will His language be the same?

...would His reaction be the same?

...would He look upon it with tear-dimmed eyes?

...will He predict for the cities of our world, the cities of our land, the same fate that He predicted for Jerusalem?

...would He be able to say, in this day, "If thou hadst only known - - now it's hidden from your eyes."

....would we be stirred to the very depth of our souls by Christina Rosetti's "The Saddest Words"...."It might have been" ... "no more" ... "too late" ?

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I'm quite ambivalent at this point, I have my moments when I think that the hope of the future of America lies within the suburbs, with whatever spiritual and emotional strength and political power that we may have. But at the same time I'm also convinced that what may happen in the cities may tip the scales. In the presence of Dr. Franklin Clark Fry some months before he died, I heard him when he made a plea in behalf of work that's being done in the cities, say to us, "But the cities do determine the course of the future."....and with that sense of history that characterized the man, he said, "That's the way it was in ancient Rome - - as the cities went, so went the provinces."

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We are the church. What is the church? Definitions come by the dozens. Let me give you the most simplistic of all: the Church is meant to be in the world as Jesus Christ. And if you accept that, that means that we who are of the Church must be of the mind of Jesus Christ in His concern for the city, as Jesus Christ did not pretend it did not exist.....as Jesus Christ, who grew up and lived practically all of His life away from the city, did not permit himself to believe that He had no concern, no involvement, no obligation, so for those of us who are part of the Church, who live where we live, there isn't a ghost of a chance, in the name of Jesus Christ, that we can take a detached attitude concerning thec city.

Now you may say to me quickly, "Well, preacher, what do you recommend? ...we're fed up with platitudes, Pastor - - what do you recommend?"

Let me recommend several things. First, that we see the city, feel its heart-ache, smell its stench, know its anguish.....then say to ourselves, can the course of the future be altered? - - and in the name of Jesus Christ answer, "Yes - granted we are willing to become agents of reconciliation." Perhaps the

most significant action taken at the Atlanta Convention of the Lutheran Church in America the end of June was the authorization of a six million dollar campaign for funds, a crash program, every penny of which is to be invested in the city. But let me warn you, money enough will not cure the ills of the city. It's what we're going to do with that money that might bring about the answer. And the answer has to come through dedicated people who will work in the city and live with the city.

Some twenty years ago with a group around me we sat in Paris. Our guest of honor for the night was the editor of a Jesuit magazine....and I was taken back when he said to us, "We consider France a pagan territory, and we're asking our church to send missionaries here, just as those of you in America send missionaries to China, to Africa, and to India."

Ought one, perhaps, to be able to say that the city is pagan territory, and the greatest need is for the missionary who represents the reconciling grace of Jesus Christ; The Rev. Mr. Massie Kennard was the Associate Pastor of Augustana Church in the District of Columbia. One of the thrilling moments we had in the Executive Council of the Lutheran Church in America was when we authorized the Board of American Missions to call a Negro to enlist Negroes as personnel for urban work. He's been at the job now for a number of months. He has about fifteen, twenty, perhaps twenty-five people lined up, to give them special training, hopefully to become these agents of reconciliation.

Three million members of the Lutheran Church in America - - over six thousand two hundred congregations.....and in a crash program so far this is part of our answer to the ill of the city. I plead with you to pray, that we might send workers into the city. We can't ignore what needs to be done here, and

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it may be our lot to hold the rope for those who go. It's an absolutely amazing thing to know that the answer must come through the Church. This is why I become grief-stricken when I hear people take their shots against the Church.....but the Church is the only institution on the face of the earth that I know that honestly, in its nobler moments, gives itself wholeheartedly to becoming agents of reconciliation. And if we falter in the course it's just because we don't give the Good Lord any better material than we do, ourselves.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded.)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
St. Michael and All Angels September 29, 1968

" . . LIKE A FATHER'S FACE"

Tomorrow morning the Rev. Dr. J. Frank Fife, President of the Maryland Synod for more than twenty years, will go to his office at 7604 York Road for the last time. On Tuesday, October 1, the President-elect, a member of this congregation, will come here to the Chapel of The Grateful Heart, as he's been invited, for a period of prayer as he begins his new duties. The prayer that we will offer in Dr. Orso's behalf will be that God will give him wisdom to guide the destiny of this Synod by virtue of his office.

Presumably, Dr. Fife will have his moment of prayer tomorrow in the office to which he's gone repeatedly during these decades. Some of us know him well enough that we can presume to tell you that his basically will be a prayer of gratitude, a prayer undoubtedly of gratitude that God has allowed him to be the Chief Pastor of this Synod for these years. And then secondly, perhaps a prayer of gratitude that now this particular stint of service in God's name is ended. If you don't misunderstand me, I could say it will be a sigh of relief, and he has well earned his retirement.

For the latter years of his office have not been easy years, as have been these latter years for anyone who finds himself in the position of leadership. It seems to be open season to take shots against leaders. It is not an easy thing.

When he looks over the days of his years as President of the Synod, as he has confided with some of us, and I do not break that confidence as I

speak to you now - - - but there is this period of unsettlement, there's no better word to describe it -- unsettlement. There is confusion, there's the groping on the part of people to try to find a way....not always sure what they ought to think....notalways sure what they ought to say. An inordinate amount of time is spent by committees framing resolutions, not knowing exactly what ought to be said.

The same is true when it comes to developing a plan for action. Part of our confusion of our day is not that people may not want to act, but maybe because they want to be sure that when they begin to act, their every effort might count for good in behalf of a cause that they would cherish and would espouse. At least, this is a charitable interpretation that could be given. There is confusion, not knowing how to say what ought to be said....not knowing what to do when a thing ought to be done. Would you believe me that it might stem from the fact that we're not exactly certain what it is that we ought to think concerning the nature and the character of God?

Maybe we'll end up some day with this characterization for our generation, that we were a generation of people who did a great deal of fuzzy thinking. This could be a curse that's coming down upon us. It takes time to think, and to think clearly and earnestly. It takes time to wrestle with a problem until you see it in the totality of the picture. It's very easy to deal with a segment; but to deal with the totality is something entirely different.

This is one reason why it's so difficult to be a leader, I think, because if a leader is worth his salt, he is in duty bound always to call peo-

ple to the attention that there is the totality of the picture, when he's wrestling with groups that come from one angle and from another angle, whose primary concern is only with a segment.

This is one reason why in this, our age, we have so great unsettlement, because particularly in the realm of theological circles, we deal with one segment, and one aspect, and some of us have a way of championing one perhaps at the expense of the other. Here is any bishop, here is any president, here is any pastor - - - and if one wants to reduce it, one can also say, here is any single individual member, who is trying to keep in total perspective the various emphases of the Gospel at one time or another....

...we've dealt with, in this our day, with those who have taken a philosophical approach, as though one could reduce God to an idea, and then you dealt with only an idea. Paul Tillich is the patron saint of those who constitute this group. And far be it from me, and I confess it very quickly, to criticize one who could think circles around me in a thousand different ways and a thousand different times. When you take the philosophical approach and the philosophical approach alone, you run the risk of ending up with an abstract notion.

...then there is the social activist, and all of his theological orientation to support his point of view....and then if one doesn't watch out, he can be running hither and to, but not knowing why, nor with what he oughtto run. One of the most significant addresses I've heard in recent time I heard just the day before yesterday. Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, of the Rochester Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church - - a man among Roman Catholics who has as much passion for the poor as any man I know, within an official position

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of the Roman Catholic Church - - the amazing things he's seeking to have done in his diocese. And yet he pleaded with a group of Lutherans to understand that unless you become involved in the world to the intent that you bring honor and glory to Jesus Christ, we run hither and yon, meaninglessly.

The unsettlement of our day may be due largely to our inability to think clearly of the nature and character of God. For until we know that this is God's world, and until we see the stamp of God upon His created order, and until we recognize Him as our Heavenly Father, we'll never know what it is to behave like His children and to treat one another as brothers. It's as basic as all that.

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Representing the Lutheran Church in America at Upper New York Synod in Rochester this past week, I was in a position to observe another synod at work. There came the time for resolutions, recommendations. One young pastor stood up and brought to the attention of the synod that the synod ought to bring to the attention of the Lutheran Church in America that the time has come when we ought to re-write our creeds - - that these creedal confessions that serve as the basis for our faith and our witness ought to be re-written - - re-written in the language that people can understand....

> .....maybe you'd have some agreement for the man who took this stance in the convention of that synod, because next Sunday we're going to use, as an example, the Nicene Creed in the Communion Service for the day. ...and if, oddly enough, somewhere in the middle of that creed I were to stop and say to you who would be present, "Now just what did you mean by these words that you used?".....or if when the service was over one of your children might look up into your face and say, "Daddy, what does this mean?" - - and then he'd stumble through some of the words from the Creed. You might be hard-pressed to answer.....

But there was a strange reaction to the proposal. A man, oddly enough who works with young people, stood up, and he said, "Whatever you do when you consider these creeds - - I don't know exactly what the maker of the motion has in mind, but please keep in the Creed an element of awe and respect for all that God is." And then the maker of the motion responded and said, "My purpose in making this motion is that we might somehow better understand the nature and the character of God because it's the Creed that spells this out for us."

And then before he sat down he said, "What I would like to see happen in this Synod is that maybe we don't ask the Lutheran Church in America to do this, but that we ask every single congregation to sit down and study the meaning of the Creeds, and re-interpret them in our day. Maybe this is the transformation that's necessary."

Now all that I have said to you is prefatory to what is the basic substance of today's sermon that bears the title, " - - Like A Father's Face." The question-of-questions is not, "Is there a God?" The question-of-questions deals with His nature and His character. What is God like? - - this is the question. I've lived long enough, I can speak for myself, to tell you that God leaves enough evidence behind Him in this world, that a man either has to be absolutely stupid or completely dull-witted, lacking any semblence of spiritual sensitivity, not to be able to detect some evidence of the fact of God. Life itself is so constituted that it brings us to the recognition of the fact that there is someone over and above us. The once-pagan in Africa was absolutely right when he said to the missionary who brought him news about God, the Christian God, for the first time when he simply remarked by saying, "We always <u>knew</u> that there was someone, but not until you came did we get His name - - not until you came were we given to understand what He's really like."

What is God like? It's an old question and it's one of the questions that they one day put to Jesus Christ. And that was a great day in the calendar of man when that happened, because as the Apostle Paul has properly said, "In Jesus Christ all the fulness of God is pleased to dwell." No one was better qualified to answer than Jesus Christ, and you know the answer that Jesus Christ gave - - - "He's like a father."

I don't know what a man has to go through, and I don't know how long he has to live until he appreciates the meaning of this characterization. I only know that as one who has tried to be a pastor for almost three decades, that I've never gotten very far, nor would I have the slightest inclination to accomplish it, by going into a home where a loved one has died - - where a loved one has been dying for a period of weeks and months, where life was slowly ebbed away tissue by tissue and cell by cell, by cancer.....then to stand there as a representative of God and say, "May the Ground of Our Being be the source of your comfort". Could it be that Jesus Christ understood our situation so well, knowing the frailty of human nature, that He said, "Call Him Father."

Oh, I'm quick to answer you, my friend. There are those who say, "This is anthropomorphism - - this is the risk that you allow people to take, they're going to make God in their image." Not so, my friend, the only language that we really have is the language that we use. If a proverbial man from Mars came and visited our Earth, and the Martian language was not the language that you and I used, yet we knew an explanation for certain things might be in order, the only language you could use is the language that's familiar to you. So Jesus Christ, recognizing this limitation, still says, "Call Him Father - - He's fatherly."

There are many blessings that come to us in our Christian understanding of father, and not the least among them is this: that ours is a personal God. So Jesus Christ took the word father, used it sublimely, the best possible figure of speech that he could use out of the experience of human nature.....then He said, "God's a Heavenly Father" - - using the qualifying expression a "Heavenly Father" is simply to say over and above all that we know is good, God is even greater and more sublime.

I salute you for your sophistication, I salute you for your intellectualism, but I presume to be bold enough to say that you would be poor indeed if you could not appreciate the reaction of a little girl, who getting awake in a darkened room was frightened and cried out to her mother for some measure of comfort. The mother replied, "But don't be afraid. God is watching over you." The child simply replied, "But I need somebody to kiss me goodnight and tuck me into bed." No matter how brilliant a man may be, no matter how self-sufficient he may be, there comes a time in life when the abstract notion of God will not suffice. Human nature is such that God must have a face. Small wonder then, that Jesus Christ, telling us about God, gave Him a face, a father's face.

What's a father's face like? It all depends on whether he's a good or a bad father - - there are both kinds, you know. You can tell a good father by his eyes: they search without staring, without searing (save when we're guilty). You can tell a good father by his lips: they speak the truth in love. And the lines on his face? They're the hall-mark of continuous conscientious concern for every single human being that He sees.

I want to close with a very simple illustration, for no sermon that pretends to be of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is complete unless it is both vertical and horizontal, for the man who would look up and see a father's face on God must

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also look out and see his brother's face on any other single human being, else the fact of the fatherhood of God is absolutely meaningless. Now this illustration, from a Russian novelist:

The devout Russian peasant had gone to the cathedral. His prayer-of-prayers was this: "O God, reveal Thy face to me."....and as he earnestly prayed there was the incense going up heavenward that clouded his vision as he opened his eyes, and yet, strangely enough, as he prayed there was a parade of faces in front of him.....all the time he was praying, "Reveal Thy face to me." Never once did there come into clear and perfect focus the face of a single person, but a parade of faces, of all sorts of people. So God answered his prayer.....

....we who would see the face of a Father
must also see where those Father's eyes are focused,
on <u>all</u> of His children.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Fifteenth Sunday After Trinity — September 22, 1968

- - Like A Good Provider
(Matthew 6:24-34)

Problems.....problems.....problems.....who doesn't have them? Big problems, little problems, ever-changing problems. The frustration that some of us know lies simply in the fact that we've allowed ourselves to believe that we'd reach a certain plateau-like existence where we would have encountered all of the problems, and then we'd be throwing ourselves in neutral for the rest of our years. But it just isn't so. Around any turn, there's a problem.

Harry Emerson Fosdick, wise man, professor of Homeletics at one time in Union Theological Seminary, as he'd go occasionally from his pulpit in Riverside Church to instruct the young men looking forward to the ministry, said, "Remember this, as you prepare your sermons, and as you stand up in the pulpit and look over your congregation, there's a sea of faces, but behind every face and within every mind you have a person with a problem."

Someone has characterized this generation - - there seems to be no end to the characterizations given to our generation - - here's one more to add to your list: that we are the most problem-conscious generation of all times. And some of us, edgy as we are going through life, seem to be the kind of person who looks upon anything, whether we want it to be that way or not, as a crisis situation. Problems.....problems.....problems.....who doesn't have them?

Now as we gather together in this place and I look upon you, so-called good people of our generation, I'd like to call your attention to the fact that good people have a particular kind of problem, and often enough you're not quite aware of it. The problem that many good people have is this: the problem of sorting out priorities. Because they are good, they seem to have constantly in

front of them the choices of any number of <u>good things</u> that they ought to be doing. We just become sensitive to the goodness, and the things that command attention. But we have only so much time, we have only so much energy. And then a problem that we have on our hands is, among all the good things that we might do, among all the good things that we could be doing, which one will we choose?

You see, once we've committed ourselves to Jesus Christ (I think I can say this, can't I?) we have a way of keeping blatant evil at arm's length, so that for many of us it really isn't a problem of " - shall I do the very good thing, or shall we do the very, very bad thing? - " Operating within a kind of moral frame of reference because of our Christian commitment, the choices so often have to be made between any number of <u>good</u> things. So our problem, then - - <u>which one gets the priority?</u>

Speaking specifically now.....

....I can readily understand why a man who is a good churchman may on occasion have to make the choice: do I go down to that meeting scheduled at church, or do I attend the PTA meeting?

...now both are good things. Which one, on this particular Tuesday night, gets the priority?

....I can understand very readily how a man who is sensitive to political and social issues may say to his Pastor or to the Vice President of the Church Council, "I'm honored that you would seek me to serve this year as the chairman of this committee. It's a good and honorable thing that ought to be done, and I'd like very much to do it. But I've decided this year that maybe I ought to run for an elective office. It's going to take all of my time

and energy beyond my family to get my constituency to believe that my record can be respected - - "

Running for Congress, making oneself available for elective office, is a good thing - - - serving in and through one's church is a good thing. Now which one gets the priority at this particular time in a man's life?

....I can readily understand how a parent, sometimes, may have to make the choice: do I participate in this program that the church offers, or do I allow this night to be given to my teen-age son?

- - quite frankly, I trust you, and I hang my head in shame when I tell you this....I've lived long enough to regret some of the unwisdom and poor judgment of other years. As an example, I should have heeded Winifred's saying to me, "But you do have two sons, you know." She and I, in God's sight, the two people held more responsible than any other two people on the face of the earth for two boys. Now it's too late. When I look back at those beginning years in the ministry, when I threw myself with complete abandon to the work of the congregation, I should have taken my calendar, and I should have marked a great big X on certain nights of the week that would have been given completely to two boys. What ought to be done when they're twelve can't possibly be done when they're twenty-two. And I think now that I would have been no less a Christian, no less a churchman, if I would have discharged wisely my obligation by not going to a church meeting and

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perhaps having been found in the bleachers.

That great and good man of a generation or so ago, I should say a decade or so ago, William Temple, the Archbishop of England, very astutely observed that God has a lot of other things in which He's interested in this world beside religion'. So I can understand why this problem of priorities comes before us. How does one in good conscience make the decision?

Well I have good news for you, my friend. When our Blessed Lord was here on earth proclaiming the Kingdom of God, He gathered wherever He could a group of people. Once the crowd was so great that He had to use the mountainside as a pulpit, and He preached the Sermon on the Mount. And in the preaching of the sermon from the mountainside, He laid down a kind of ground-rule that will help all of us in this whole matter of priorities.

He said something like this, which constitutes the text for this sermon:

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be yours as well."

'Seek ye first the kingdom of God - - ' Whenever you want to talk about priorities, as one who is committed to Jesus Christ you make your choice on this basis: the Kingdom comes first.

Now let me brace you for this understanding of the Kingdom of God. It's to be understood as a wider concept than just the church as you and I know it itself. The Kingdom of God basically is the rule of God in the mind and the hearts of men, so that in the society of which they are part, they give themselves to justice and to compassion. The whole world belongs to God, and God wants to rule His world. So He rules through the minds and the hearts of men and women. This is the ground-rule: The Kingdom comes first.

Now I can understand why, for a man, he may say, "For me, I can serve

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the Kingdom best by becoming a minister - - that's the choice I made. And I decided against law, and I decided against something that was so dear to my father's heart, following in his footsteps and becoming a merchant. But another man, however, can decide for himself that he's putting the Kingdom first by entering the political arena. One woman may decide to become a deaconess, another might decide to become a novelist. But once one has made his commitment to Jesus Christ, his decision is that he will serve the Kingdom by whatever vocation is pleasing in God's sight - - whatever vocation.

Now the question is this: what happens then, in this choice of a priority? Where do we become distracted? Where do we get off the track?

It could be that we become anxious, and we feel that the things of this world, the materialistic world, have to come first and we just reverse the order as far as God is concerned. God says, 'Put the Kingdom first and the things of this world take care of themselves.' We put the things of this world first and forget about God's realistic reading of the world.

Why are you and I anxious? Why are you and I insecure? So often it's because we're afraid the hold that we have on the things of this world will slip. We become so attached to the things of this world. We have more people suffering from neuroses today, and at the same time we have our highest level of affluence. There is in Europe, in northern Europe, a country that's frequently referred to as a group of people who have the highest standard of living in the world - - - they also have, so we're told by sociologists, the highest suicidal rate.....anxious, insecure, materialistic-minded.

We put the wrong things first. Some day, I submit to you, we may reach the place where we'll turn around and say, 'Jesus, God's great Galilean, you really had something there! - but we never paid you too much attention. When

you said 'Seek the things of the Kingdom first', you knew what you were talking about....but we just got the thing reversed. ....so much so that you and I spend an inordinate amount of our time and energy, Monday through Saturday, trying to raise our own economic level, trying to take care of our own financial security. And the older some of us become, the more edgy we are about tomorrow, financially.

I told you Jesus Christ was a realist. As you read this Gospel lesson for the day, He doesn't say that food, clothing and shelter are not important - - - of course they are! And I, for one, would not want to live in a world where I had to live on the bare necessities of life. I'd like the added touches, and so, I dare say, would you. Jesus Christ is not saying that we are to ignore the fact that a man must eat. I think it can be said that of all the religions in the world, Christianity is the most materialistic. We do concern ourselves with the things of this world, but secondarily, not primarily - - we do concern ourselves with the things of this world.

I say this as a matter of encouragement, not out of vanity, but one of the gratifying things that comes to some of us who happen to be related to this parish is that a significant portion of whatever we bring on a Sunday morning to this altar passes immediately through our hands and goes out into the world, so that it might be translated as soon as possible into food for the hungry, clothing for the unclad, trying to raise the economic level of the disadvantaged and even the culturally-deprived. Our Blessed Lord did not ignore the fact that a man must eat, that a man must live.

One is reminded of the story of the man who allowed himself to become engaged in a disreputable occupation. And he said to a wise old man, " - but I'm doing this because a man must live!" The wise old man immediately retor-

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ted, - - and why? So Jesus Christ is saying to those of us who would become attached to the things of this world - - but why? - - to what end will you deal with material things? Only as they might serve the Kingdom itself. To maintain that Man does not live by bread alone (and you find that verse in the Bible) is not the same as saying that man can live without bread. The trouble is, however, that we of this affluent generation believe that we can't live without cake - - cake that's got to be heavily frosted at that! And when this mentality sets in, then we run the risk of getting our priorities fouled up.

I'm numbered among that diminishing group of people who can remember the days of the Depression. That little brood of children that we were, clustering around our mother when Dad was out somewhere trying to get a dollar, we were among those families who sometimes didn't know where the next meal might be coming from. But Bless my mother, she always reminded us that God would provide.....and He did.

Now in these latter days in which you and I live, these so-called affluent days, it's the same lesson that we have to master, only it's harder to learn it. For man foolishly permits himself to think that it's by his might and by his power that we amass these things that we can touch and store away. Yet it is by the hand of God that our needs are provided.....

"Said the sparrow to the robin,
'I should like to know,
Why these anxious human beings
Rush about and worry so.'
Said the robin to the sparrow,
'This I do not know,
Lest it be they have no Heavenly Father
Such as cares for you and me.'"

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There are two great DON'Ts in the New Testament, spoken by Jesus Christ:

"Don't worry - - "

"Don't judge - - "

When He said, "Don't worry," He was talking about "Don't worry about the things of this world, because if you put the Kingdom first, the things of this world take care of themselves. Trust me to provide. Keep me still in the picture".....

.....and when He said, "Don't judge," He was reminding us too that we were edging Him out of the picture and we were assuming His right to judge. For our sakes God is pleading with us:

"Keep me in the picture."

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Fourteenth Sunday After Trinity September 15, 1968

" - - like a Faith Healer"
(Luke 17:11-19)

The opening sentences for this sermon are also the extract which appeared on the front page of this week's MESSENGER - -

" . . no matter how you read the record (a reverent reference, that is, to the New Testament), it's exciting to note what a rather odd assortment of folks such as tax collector, a fisherman, a tentmender and even a physician had to say about it: blind men were made to see, lame men were made to walk, deaf men made to hear!

(and all, I would add, without any surgical procedure, without any injection, without any therapy, without any medical application)

" . . it happened because they had faith. Now it didn't happen every day, and it didn't happen to everyone. But it did happen - - and still does! . . . "

While the thoughts for this sermon were becoming pregnant, I stood on Thursday night of this week at the bedside of my ailing, almost 90-year old father. And as I stood there, precious moments of the past came back, moments when he told me about a woman that I'd like to tell you about now very briefly, a woman whom you've never met, nor have I....and a woman, I dare say, that you would like very much to have known, and I even more so than you - - - my father's mother, my paternal grandmother.

This is what my Dad used to tell me about her.

He was born in the Old Country, you know, and this happened there. His brother had become ill, critically ill, in fact as my father tells the story, they had given up hope. But this woman of whom I speak now, a very devout woman, and sometimes I think in moments that whatever spiritual sensitivity God has allowed me as one person, I'd like to think I could trace it through her....a woman I have never known.....being a very devout member of the Orthodox Catholic Church, this is what my Dad said she did. She crawled on all fours, that is, on her hands and on her knees, from the house where they lived to the village church, as an act of humility, honestly believing that God could hear her son.

And as she crawled she made known to God that she wasn't worthy to ask for so great a blessing. She humbled herself, and when she got to the church she prostrated herself before the altar and had her final act of devotion.....only now, like a page from the Bible, to get up and to walk back home to be greeted by people in the house who said: "The fever is gone! - - he's getting better!"

" . . no matter how you read the record, it's exciting to note what a rather odd assortment of folks such as a tax collector . . "

...I'll identify him for you, he wrote a book about Jesus - - Matthew

" . . a rather odd assortment of folks, a fisherman . . "

...Peter by name

" . . a tentmender . . "

...you've already named him, the itinerant one, Paul

" . . a physician . . "

...the writer of the third Gospel, his name was Luke - - and now I would add proudly, a woman, my grandmother - - who talked about faith healing.

Let me warn you at once, while I believe in faith healing, you must recognize that while it happened, it didn't happen every day, and it didn't happen to everyone. But it did happen. I would also warn you that while I believe in faith healing, and while this sermon is about faith healing, I shan't be able to answer all your questions, just as I haven't been able to answer all my questions. But let's get along with it together, shall we, and do what we can.

Significantly enough, today's Gospel Lesson will hold us in good stead, at least give us a point or two that we'll have to deal with. It's an account of ten men who were leprous who came to Jesus Christ, and the encounter resulted in an act of faith healing. They were restored to physical health. Now as you may have remembered this passage as it was read for you this morning, and perchance you'll want to read it again in the course of the day for yourself - - it's the 17th chapter of Luke, you can find it for yourself - - - the ten men came and as a result of their encounter with Jesus Christ there was an act of faith healing. What can we learn from it?

First off, you must recognize the fact that when they came to Jesus Christ they pleaded for consideration on the basis of His compassion. One translation has it: "Jesus, have mercy on us - - "

...another translation has it: "Jesus, have pity on us - - " Whenever you are about to encounter God, let me suggest that you forever re-

member this: that this is the point at which you begin - - you appeal to His compassion.

Now unfortunately for many of us, when we are in dire straits, we may wittingly or unwittingly parade before God all our merit badges, all the things that we've done which we permit ourselves to believe entitle us to some kind of favored consideration on the part of the Almighty. Human as we are, in our difficult moments, because we have tried to do what's right, we may foolishly permit ourselves to believe that we don't deserve it, the untoward thing that has happened to us. And so our first reaction might be when we come to God, who is able to perform the miracle -- this we don't doubt - - - - - we spoil it all, however, by saying,

"God - - let's get with it now - -

"God - - let's get this thing moving along

in my direction, God, because - - - - -"

....then we parade in front of Him all our merits.

Well I have news for you, my friend. If you haven't already found it for yourself - - you and I never come to God as we come to a bargaining table, because we just don't have anything to bargain with in the sight of God! I'm indebted to that precious grandmother of mine who taught me that the approach to God is always on your knees. You don't come strutting into the presence of God.

Well, when you want to talk about faith healing, if you want to talk about a miracle you'd like to have, maybe this would hold you in good stead -- the approach is always on the basis of God's compassion, not on our merit. And the appeal is never primarily to His power.

The second thing that one notes in this miracle account which serves as the

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Gospel for today is that there wasn't anything at all dramatic about it. Now this may strike you as a rather odd thing to say about God. God doesn't act dramatically. We're foolish enough to believe that unless a thing is dramatic God doesn't have a thing to do with it. But this whole account of the ten lepers and the healing that was made effective was a very undramatic thing ....no snapping of the divine finger, and presto! a miracle occurred. None of that whatsoever. But rather, as you read this account, He issued a strange directive. He said to these ten lepers, "Now you go and show yourselves to the priest."

Goodness knows, they had done that a thousand times - -

(that's an extravagant gesture, simply to say they had done it repeatedly)

....nothing sensational, now, about this thing, where He shaps His finger and right on the spot they're healed.....nothing about going to the temple and in front of the assembled people the miracle would occur - - - that would have been sensational all right. But He said, "Now, you go - -

....that means go back and do the same thing you did yesterday, the day before that, and two days before that

...go back and walk the same way

...go back to the routine monotonous procedure of your day's life

.....and end up in front of the priest. Nothing dramatic about that, surely nothing at all sensational.

And yet sometimes when you and I come to deal with this whole matter of faith healing, we don't believe that it's going to happen unless it happens

dramatically, instantaneously - - as though God works only in a dramatic fashion.

Now the surprising thing is that " - - ad they went - - " they were healed. They had done this thing before, but this time when they were doing it, they were doing it out of a sense of allegiance to a direct obedience to Jesus Christ, and somehow this time God is brought very definitely into the picture. And even God as He is about to work, reaches out for somebody else! He brings the priest into the picture.

I suppose this sermon might have a different flavor if while talking about faith healing I could have an array in front of you here of crutches, and old bandages, and braces, and even litters. But I have none of that to bring before you - - only to make perfectly plain to you that I don't have all the answers. Because when a miracle does occur, it occurs according to God's pleasure, and you and I are confounded at that point because we can never fully understand the mind of God.

That shouldn't really surprise you, because if you and I could fully understand the mind of God, then we would be made equal to God. But you and I do happen to be finite, not infinite, and just because you can't understand God ought not to baffle you over-much because in sober moments of reflection, you don't always understand yourself. Sometimes our behavioral patters are very strange to us. So one picks up a bit and says that even the preformance of a miracle is according to God's pleasure and you and I can never fully understand why God may decide to do this and not decide to do something else.

This is not to say that God is not always at work. God is always at work. And one of the things that you and I must remember is that sometimes He works in a very imperceptible way. It was " - - as they went - - " that they were cleansed. The miracle happened in no sensational manner.

It's the business of a pastor, and he has no right to be a pastor if he can't put the best possible and charitable construction upon people. Those are familiar words too, aren't they, from the Catechism? So, inclined to believe this, as I think of those ten lepers, only one returned gratefully - - yet I would say the other nine, putting a charitable construction upon their behavioral pattern, the miracle occurred in almost an imperceptible manner....

" - - as they were going - - "....the thing happened. And only one of them happened to stand still long enough to recognize what had taken place.

In my relationships with people who have become old, every now and then I discover a person who says, "I've reached the place in life where I can recognize that the hand of God has been at work in my life. I recognize it now as I have not seen it before, and I shall spend the remaining years of my life living and serving, obeying and thanking Him." Kind friend, it's only sometimes that as we reach a certain place and look back, that we can see how the hand of the Lord has been at work - - - not always as we had told Him it ought to be.....vain as we are, we can dictate even to God - - but He's been at work. And there might be the miracles of healing going on the like of which you and I never quite recognized.

I speak to you, my friend, out of a fair degree of frustration in my own soul, to wax a bit personal again for a moment - - almost five years ago now, on that special mission around the world.....didn't I get sick, even before I got to India...and didn't I ask God to make me well - - didn't I pray for some miracle? And then to top it all off, in Kathmandu, didn't I get that pinched nerve that almost drove me crazy?...and didn't I, in my vanity, say to God -- "Isn't it about time that you get off my back!" - - didn't I try to argue with Him and say, "You sent me out here -- I'd like to do a good job, but I'm limping along, and, God, if there's some kind of a lesson you're trying to

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teach me in this thing, I think you've gotten your message across to me - - " ...the healing came, but not on my terms, and not as soon as I would have liked it. And oddly enough, when it did come, it came almost imperceptibly. But it came.

I wish I could answer all your questions. If it worked then and it worked for this person, why doesn't it work for me? Your questions are my questions. But as Christians we are of all people the most fortunate because in Jesus Christ God has revealed Himself, and even Jesus Christ ended the days of His years without a miracle of physical relief.

Well, I stood Thursday night after I had seen my father, I went to the Medical Hall and I delivered the address to a graduation program for the School of Nursing - - thirty-some highly impressionable young people, going out themselves, heart and hand, as the extension of God's hand. For this is the healing art, this is the healing ministry. And I could not help but say to myself, again and ever so often there will be somebody who will cry out for physical relief, God will send a physician, God will raise up a pharmacist, God will raise up a nurse, technician, a research agent - - - the miracles happen slowly, through these people.

But then I also knew that there will be those for whom no miracles, as we look upon it, will occur - - the miracles for the flesh, and if it doesn't happen for the flesh, it could be that we've kept God working over-time trying to work the miracle for the mind and the heart and the soul.....

.....which may lie in this department labeled:

GREATER MIRACLES

....now think about that for a while.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Thirteenth Sunday After Trinity September 8, 1968

"- - like a Good Samaritan"
(Luke 10:25-37)

It's one thing to answer a man's questions; it's an entirely different thing to be able to answer the questioner. When our Blessed Lord was here on earth He was the kind of man who was able to get people to ask questions...

...sometimes they asked the questions simply because they had a genuine interest in the particular subject...they were earnest seekers after truth....

...sometimes they asked the questions because they wanted to entrap Him.....

But we have reason to believe that our Lord seldom if ever ignored a man who put a question to Him.

You see, this carpenter's-son-turned-preacher did not announce a series of lectures, and then say, "Come to me, people - - attend all twelve lectures and I will teach you the way of the Lord." This carpenter's-son-turned-itinerant-preacher-and-teacher did not establish a kind of theological-seminary-of-sorts in which He offered graduate courses for those who would be His students. Yet no one taught as He taught, and when you think of Jesus Christ you have a perfect right to say, "He came teaching."

It's very important to note that when a man put a question to Him, He used that as an occasion for a teaching situation. This is clearly evident in the pages of the New Testament. This is why He allowed Himself to be very sensitive to the kind of thing that people were thinking, and He allowed them to ask their questions.

Again and ever so often one also discovers that He was never content just to answer a question. His primary concern was in answering the man who put the question to Him. There's a world of difference. You may answer a question but it doesn't always follow that you've answered the questioner. And the latter is far more important, perchance, than the former. This is why it's good sound advice for an old school-master to pass on to the young teacher - - "Learn your pupils before you teach them ....

> ...acquaint yourself with the type of personalities that they are...acquaint yourselves with the kinds of attitudes that they have toward things and people....acquaint yourself as best you can with their behavioral patterns....

- - "Learn your pupil, know him, and then treat him accordingly."

It's a wise parent, of course, who asks God for a bit of wisdom that he might understand his youngster. For youngsters, too, you see, are always asking questions, and no man who asks a question ought ever to be ignored. For like as not in asking the question he's revealing something about himself. The difficulty for many of us may lie when we have children around us who become silent - - indrawn - - highly reflective. And who knows but what in their moods they're asking all kinds of questions, but for one reason or another they never become articulate. Some of us find ourselves, much to our sorrow, realizing that we've done a disservice to those around us because we never so much as either discerned or recognized the questions they were asking.

So this carpenter's-son-turned-preacher never so much as ignored a ques-

tion because He knew behind every question there was the questioner. Practically all of His teaching, so it would seem to us sometimes when we read the pages of the New Testament, came as a result, because somebody asked a question. Some of the most significant parables that you and I remember came as answers because somebody put a question to Him....

All kinds of questions of course...

...once there was a man who came with this peculiar kind of question, to ask this itinerant preacher to give Him advice about this whole business of his estate, and how about dividing his inheritance?

...so Jesus listened to that man's question about having his inheritance divided, and He used the question for a teaching situation, the telling all about a rich fool.....

....and when you and I read those stories that He told that relate upon this particular theme, we could write down at the bottom of the page a very simple statement: There are no pockets in a shroud"

...this, too, part of the answer of Jesus Christ to a man whose magnificent obsession was the things he could grasp, and hold on to...

...once somebody put a question to Him about "How long do you go on forgiving a person?".....and Jesus answered the questioner by teaching him a lesson about forgiveness.....

Today's Gospel lesson came about because somebody asked a question. If you read all of the Gospel lesson you'll discover that Jesus was talking rather privately to some of His disciples, and then as though it were on the edge of the group, a very earnest-minded chap discovered that the wheels were going around in his own head, and so he used the occasion to put a question

to the teacher. And what was his question?

"Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Now focus clearly upon the man who put the question. Don't ever forget it, it's one thing to answer a question, it's another thing to answer the questioner. The man who put the question is sometimes the forgotten person in the parable of the Good Samaritan. We easily remember the victim, we easily remember the priest and the Levite, and of course we're not to forget the hero of the story, the Good Samaritan. But we must also remember that this all happened because there was one man who put a question to Jesus Christ. Now think about him for a little while.

The Scriptures say he was a lawyer. Well now, we've got to clear up that point. He wasn't a lawyer in the sense that we think of men who are lawyers today. He was a lawyer because he dealt with the laws of God. He was an interpreter of the law that Moses gave, and the laws that were promulgated by the Levites. He was, if you please, a theologian - - someone said he was a first-century intellectual who kept asking questions. Now this was the man who put the question - - the man with the curious mind, the man who had come to grips with the most important single question that a man can ever ask: "Eternal life - - how can I have it?"

It can be said that if he were living today he might not ask the question in the very same way, but the import of the question would still be raised. There are those who tell us that this is the question that's being raised by serious-minded people, and ever so often, more outside the Church than in the Church. People who are very discerning, who see what's being produced on Broadway, who read the novels that are being prepared in this century, tell us that this is the question-of-questions that's being dealt with. It's

being raised in different ways by different voices, but basically the thing that matters most in serious-minded people is: How can life give any meaning at all to me? - - or if you want to put the question this way:

- - How can I be saved? - -

...from all that frustrates me, from all that's meaningless?

- - How can I keep myself from being damned? - -

...by the pressures and the tensions of life?

Salvation means many things to many different people, but nonetheless it's always the case of the individual trying to get some kind of meaning out of life. Even Albert Camus, who did not pretend to be a believer, who called himself an agnostic - - yet in several novels that he wrote there's a decided religious theme that deals with the meaning of life....and in some of the novels of Faulkner you catch certain characters that he introduces who represent and reflect in their lives the qualities of Jesus Christ, as though this would be His answer.

Difficult as it is for me to tell you this, and as I know some of you it will be far more difficult for you to hear it, but maybe in the restlessness, and the unsettlement, and the strange behavioral patterns of present-day youth, these things are simply an indication of the question-of-questions that they are trying to raise and yet can't quite articulate: What is the meaning of life? They have a favorite word that puts some of us fairly on edge and would make us almost scream - - they say some of us are phony - - they say some of us are not authentic.....which is simply to say that in their book we haven't dealt with the real issue of life, and whatever answer

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we've decided upon for ourselves isn't an answer that's going to satisfy them. Despite the fact that you may be inclined to ignore it, and to throw them into a steaming shower, maybe the restlessness and the unsettlement is an indication that they're trying to ask a question and they don't know how. Perchance the man who is best in this whole matter of inter-personal relationships is the man who is able to discover the kind of question that a man is raising in his mind when he has nothing but a blank look upon his face.

So Jesus Christ could not find it in His heart to ignore this man - - who might have been putting Him to a test and just making conversation:

"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

...so Jesus sought to answer the questioner by telling him a story. It's the unforgettable story of the Good Samaritan. I don't have to give you the story again, do I? Let me touch upon the high points ever so quickly....

> ...a man was traveling a dangerous road...he fell among thieves. Having been victimized, there he lay, in need. ...two men came by, each one an honorable man....never so much as stretched forth a hand that would help. Then a man did come....took it upon himself to meet the need.....

Jesus told the story in such a very plain way that when He put a question, them, to the man who asked the question, there was only one answer....

"Who do you think was neighbor to the
man who fell among thieves?"

...and the questioner in the first place simply had to say:

"He who showed mercy."

So Jesus answers the question: "What shall I do to get eternal life?"

In a certain sense, Jesus is saying, Well, you've got to decide for yourself what kind of a person you're going to become. You have three choices, according to the characters in the story....

- - you can become, as you go through life, like the robber ...who builds his philosophy upon the fact that what's his is mine, if I can get it, I'll grab it ...there are people like that, who when they are asked the question of life, 'What does it mean?' they simply say it means to go through life grasping, getting - - from anyone, anywhere, even if you have to create the situation, even if you have to scheme and to plan and to abet.....

- - then there are the priest and the Levite. They were men who decided, if you want to brand them now, as men who geared their life on the philosophy that 'what is mine is mine and I will keep it'....they were perfectly good people, as standards go. There are people, many of them, like that today - - who work hard, who are ambitious, who take good care of what they have....they're not spend-thrifts and they don't spend their money unwisely, but they keep it for themselves.

There was the third character: What's mine is his, if he needs it. So the Good Samaritan took from what he had and gave to him. You and I will always be confronted by somebody else's need. The question is, will we be able to see that the man is in need? Now, when confronted by another man's need, wherever the man may be and whatever his need may be, the precise moment for the Christian has arrived when all questions save one can be ig-

nored. What can I do to help now? is the only question that remains.

...how did it happen?

...who's to blame?

...why doesn't somebody else do something?

...how can this be prevented?

...all these questions are important, but they are important only after the wound has been dressed, and after the man nearest at hand has done what he can with what he has.

Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

...and Jesus answered the questioner:

Are you the kind of a person who is

willing to become involved in this life?

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Festival of The Harvest October 13, 1968

"- - Like A RAIN-GIVER"
(Deuteronomy 11:8-21)

Among the joys that come to any pastor of a congregation is the privilege and the opportunity of sitting with a group of young people. These Friday nights I have been sitting with ninth-graders as we have the two-hour dinner session. It was quite an experience this past Friday. As alert, as spiritually sensitive, as enthusiastic a group as I've ever seen. I allowed them all the freedom that I could possibly give them to express themselves. There were certain moments when it became very uncomfortable, but I would like to transfer something of the kind of thing they put to me, to you, even now as you gather in this place.

As an example, they indicted us, people who gather together for worship, as participating in a service and not really meaning what we say. Just what they would want us to do with the Liturgy I'm not quite certain, but at any rate the indictment was made that when we, as a group of worshipping Christians, come together, we use words thoughtlessly.

That's quite an indictment. Of course what they fail to recognize is that they were indicting themselves as well, because every single one of those youngsters present happens to be the kind of a youngster who attends quite faithfully. So the indictment is there. How valid is it?

We have been using, now, this magnificent Liturgy of the Church that comes down to us through the ages. We used it at 8:30, we just used it now, we'll use it again at 11:00 o'clock. Ought we to have done with it? Ought we to scrap it? Ought we to improvise every Sunday when we come, hoping that if we're using

something fresh, then thought might be given to the words that are about to be used. I pose the question for what it may be worth to you.

You have a right to know that there are a number of different things for which I pray when I get up on a Sunday morning. One of them is this: that if I am to conduct the Liturgy hour after hour after hour as I will be doing this day, that God would allow me to bring a measure of freshness to it <u>each time the service is being held</u>, so that by the time 9:30 and 11:00 may come along I will not give you the impression that what I am doing now for the second and third time in the course of any given day is being done automatically, casually, and in a detached manner....that the freshness that becomes it might characterize it whenever it's being used, which is simply to say to you that I honestly believe that the fault does not lie in the words that we use. The fault may be in us, that we use them thoughtlessly. The words themselves are fraught with rich meaning, they're time-honored and time-tested, and it's simply because the Church has yet to find a better way to express itself that we're asked to use these words.

I know a man for whom I have high regard who once spoke to his people about the Lord's Prayer. And he began, as you might expect him to begin, by saying: "These are familiar words. We all use them. And so often we use them thoughtlessly" - - a very valid observation. But he said, "The fault may lie in the fact that we look upon these words as ritual words - - they are part of a ceremony, they are part of a ritual, and maybe we don't permit ourselves to believe that they ought to be said <u>thoughtfully</u> just because they happen to be ritual."

On the other hand he made quite a distinction. He said, "There are <u>real</u> words that we use, and when we use them we use them in a very real sense every

time we use them." And I suppose he could have gone on and elaborated in this manner - - in our every-day relationships we even use words ritually, whether we recognize it or not: "A good morning to you" - - and a "Hello!" - - and a "Goodby" - - and a "How are you?" are words ritually spoken when we greet each other, because they're the same words that we use over and over and over again. Just catch yourself after this service is over, when you greet someone - - you might be using the very same words that you used last Sunday, tomorrow morning, that you're going to use then for somebody else, even as you used them yesterday: "How are you?"

Even in our relationships, day by day, in our conversation, we may use words ritually. It's a kind of a rite that we experience when we greet other people. Take that expression "Goodby" - - - even though we may use it casually and freely when we part with someone, it's a contraction from the Old English: "God be with you" - - that's what we're really saying, a perfectly good expression.

....and what does the word God itself mean? Here again it comes from the Anglo-Saxon - - it means good. So in a certain sense we're saying to a person when we part company with him: "May all that is good attend you." But then we back off a distance and we say to ourself, but I'm a Christian who is using this word God, and for a Christian the word God means certain things that it does not mean to anybody who isn't a Christian. Oh, I wish I would have had a tape recording now to play for your benefit the reaction of the group on Friday night when I asked them to define for me and to describe the nature and the character of the God in whom they believe as a Christian. So when a Christian says: "God be with you" he may mean ever so much more than anyone may mean who happens to be a non-Christian when he says "Goodby."

Maybe there is such a thing as using words in a ritual manner. Surely we

understand what we mean when we say "using words in a real sense." I'm just as human as you are, and sometimes when I say to a person: "How are you?" I move hurriedly down the street, lest the person happen to answer and tell me exactly, from limb-to-limb and week-to-week and moment-to-moment just how he happens to be. "How are you?" - - sometimes we hardly wait for an answer, when we use the words in a ritual sense. But I tell you with all the ardor of my soul, when you stand at the door of a hospital room where someone whom you love is critically ill and you address the very same words: "How are you?" ....or perhaps you address the very same words "How is he?" to the surgeon, to the nurse - - you don't go hurriedly down the hall, but you wait there, with bated breath, for these are words being asked in a very real sense.

So the indictment is made, ritually we give them little thought, but nonetheless they're very valid words and to be used in a very real sense. Maybe this is one reason why our younger friends can tell us that we appear to be so thoughtless.

But I'm also caught up in what they might lead me to believe, that maybe there isn't much point in praying some of the things that we talk about in the Lord's Prayer, at least from their sophisticated level and as the children of modern man, whose age is characterized by those scientific and technological advances.....

..."Give us this day our daily bread"

...suppose one would begin to think seriously about that expression. At first blush he may shy away from it, for is there a relationship between God and daily bread for modern man? The average teen-ager, using him again as an example, knows exactly where bread comes from - - it comes from the bread-rack, from the bread-shelf, in the supermarket.....a vastly different situation, you see, from the days of my child-

hood, when my mother baked bread once a week. I can still see her preparing it, I can still see it rising in the pan.....in the most nostalgic of all memories, I can still smell it. When the man from the mill at the edge of town brought us the flour, and when I could walk to the edge of the town, to Don Snyder's farm, and see the fields of wheat, when I could hear the farmers when they came to town and talk about the need for rain - - I recognized at once the fact that we are dependent creatures. And as an impressionable lad there was no difficulty whatsoever in making the relationship between God and bread.

But it becomes increasingly difficult for us in our day. We are not the simple Galilean peasants for whom bread could be a matter of life and death. And we who live in the affluence of our suburban setting cannot recognize at once that bread is the staff of life. We who live so far removed from pockets of poverty, at home or abroad, we who seem to be unmoved whatsoever that at least a third of the world's population is starving to death. Because we are so far removed from this, bread is a matter of course, and God just isn't part of the picture.

I remember after World War II gathering in little clusters under the huge elm trees in Princeton, New Jersey. One day we found ourselves in the company of a man who had been a prisoner of war, a Britisher. He told us how one night in 1940 he sat in a Normandy restaurant, eating the finest meal from the French cuisine. Ten days later, as a prisoner of war, discovering that when the rations were given for the next day, it was one loaf of bread for eight people. "That night," he said, "When I prayed, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' I had deep and sober thoughts of God."

What a pity for us that we become so sophisticated, so limited, what a pity!

Not that one ought not to benefit from the advances that come to us because of our experience -- the scientist, the technologist - - all these are God's agents, helping us to become partners with the unfolding of the universe..... it's a tremendous thing to become an agent of God. But the emphasis must always be upon "as an agent of God." Greatly reduced, of course, was the experience of the Children of Israel when they were being taken out of bondage, into a whole new world.....step by step as they journeyed through those forty years toward their brave new world they were constantly being told that in that brave new world of theirs God would be at work, and that when the fields would yield their increase it would be only because God was to be seen as the Giver of the Rain, and there would be no crops without rain. This was being hammered into them constantly and in a certain sense it was a golden age, because man as a dependent creature wore something of a halo because he recognized that behind all good things was the creating, sustaining hand of the Heavenly Father.

The ancient ones, when the world of religion was young, had a very simple and uncomplicated way of thinking about God. For them, whatever happened, whatever occurred, it was according to God's pleasure or to His displeasure. Rain, as an example, came as a gift from the heavens upon the parched earth, and they were grateful. Modern man in his sophistication prides himself as the rain-maker since he's learned to manage the clouds. But what a pity, really. At least in the old days he was grateful!

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Reformation Sunday

October 27, 1968

CONCERNING STEWARDSHIP - -

From prior announcement you undoubtedly know that your Senior Pastor has been asked this day to preach a special sermon. Now let me say at once that any preacher worth his salt might resent the fact that he would be called upon to preach a special sermon. For once he's been ordained, once he's been set aside as a proclaimer of God's Truth, as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament, if he has any integrity at all, every time he stands up to speak he looks upon this as a special moment, as a special opportunity.

Without appearing immodest or being vain, I would like to believe that this pulpit is characterized by a consistent faithfulness to the Word and by a consistent level of performance in proclamation. At the risk of appearing morbid, one might also say very quickly that it could be that any sermon that a man preaches could be his last. And realizing that always as a possibility, does not the earnest-minded preacher then ask God to enable him, by His empowering Holy Spirit to make the most of any occasion, lest he make something less of the opportunity that's still afforded him?

Yet the fact remains that your Senior Pastor has been asked to preach a "special" sermon today. I understand at once the rationale behind the request; even though these prefatory statements have been made, I concur heartily. For the emphasis for the moment now falls , not upon a special sermon, but upon a special sermon today. For what may make a sermon special may not be necessarily the message itself, for the Truth of the Gospel should come through loud and clear every time a man stands up to speak. What may make a sermon special, then, may not be the sermon itself or its message, but the occasion.

So I recognize the emphasis upon this day, this day in the calendar of the Church, the 451st anniversary of the Protestant Reformation - - enough to make any man stand at tiptoe, recognizing the valid contributions that have been made to all Christendom through that 16th century contribution of emphasis upon renewal through reform....and we of all people ought to be grateful for that.

- - I recognize the fact that today, in the life of this congregation, is a time when we receive a group of new members, when between 40 and 50 people rise up on one occasion and in one place, and give you to understand that you've struck a responsive chord in their hearts and as they go forward in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ they want to go forward with you - - that there's something about your concern for the Kingdom of God that makes them say it...."We want to be part of it."

> ...in this day and age people do not identify themselves with anything unless it has vitality, and validity. This is no small matter in the life of this congregation -- today -- when this should happen during the 11:00 o'clock hour.

- - today is a special day in the calendar of the Church because it marks the launching of the ACT Program.....and as I stand before you I think of how it was triggered at the Atlanta Convention -- an absolutely amazing thing, when one person out of more than three million members of the Lutheran Church in America, when one pastor out of almost sixty-five hundred pastors in the Lutheran Church in America walks out onto a convention floor, with a piece of yellow paper (almost the color of this -- I saw it before he went into the convention) - - in his own handwriting, his concern for his Church and the cause of Jesus Christ, that it might in an emergency way make an impact upon the unsettlement of society. For me,

the miracle of Atlanta was Bob Neumeyer, triggering into action more than six thousand, two hundred congregations so that today we launch a six million dollar appeal, to make a direct thrust, in the name of Jesus Christ, upon an unsettled world. This is the day when that's being launched.

- - very particularly, for us in this congregation, this is the day when we're launching our 1969 Stewardship Appeal. For hopefully tomorrow morning the postman will deliver to your door -- it was put in the mails yesterday -- a letter from your Senior Pastor, and in that letter there will be a pledge card, asking you to give prayerful concern to what we honestly believe God is putting before us, heirs of the Reformation, in this place and in this day....and we're being invited to support it.

Now it's no small matter in the life of a congregation when by authority of the Committee on Stewardship, and by the Church Council, that the decision should be made that there would be no visitation in your homes....

> ...where a person would come and sit down in front of you, and face-to-face talk about the Kingdom of God -- your part in it -- and enlist your financial support, and the stewardship of your time and your talents....
>
> - - it's no small thing in the life of a congregation when it should be desired that there would be no stewardship suppers as such, when a series of presentations would be made.....

It's a great moment in the life of a congregation when its pastor can be trusted to be charged with the responsibility, such as you have thrust upon me, and when there is enough faith in the people of the congregation themselves to believe that they will respond, in the quiet of their own homes, by

opening an envelope and prayerfully considering a pledge card, and reflecting upon God's grace and God's truth in their own way. I'm every bit as human as you.....as recently as a week ago last night I was still shying away from this responsibility, and was hoping and praying that perhaps another course could be taken, because I recognize at face value what's being placed upon us.....

...one sermon.....one hour in God's House -- all of your prior experience of the grace of God.

It's a singular thing in the life of any people when they're willing to trust the single thrust for the underwriting of a program in the amount of some $220,000. But with all my faults, so glaringly known to a number of you by this time, I hope you'll never fault me as one who evades responsibility. I may fumble, I may falter as I undertake it, but by the grace of God I hope I will never avoid it. So here I stand.

I stand now with a measure of confidence because of two things that have happened - -

I am indebted to a sermon that was preached in the quiet of the parsonage a number of weeks or months ago, when a member of this congregation and I sat down and talked. We talked about theology, we talked about the Sacraments, we talked about the teachings of the Church.....and as we talked this member of the congregation for whom I have so high regard said to me, "But, Pastor - -" (I'm speaking freely now) - - "you ought to have a more relaxed way about yourself - - you've been taking things far too seriously."

...it reminds me of what Kathryn VonBora Luther said to her husband when he came down with a sad look upon his face...and as she was wearing black, "Martin, what's come over you?- - you act as though somebody's died."....

...and he said, "And why are you wearing black? - who died?".....and she

said, "I thought God died, from the way you have been thinking and behaving lately."

So, Leo, in the presence of these people I acknowledge my debt to you for calling me anew to the precious Gospel of the fact that God lives...and therefore I would hope that every time you and I come together you'd detect a smile on my face.

The second thing to which I'm indebted was -- it happened a week ago today. It was the unique service in Riverside Church when Robert James Marshall had committed to him the Office of the President of the Lutheran Church in America. The President-Designate kneels in front of the altar....

...picture it now, won't you please - - four people stand in front of him representing the Cause of Jesus Christ through the Lutheran Church in Africa, in South America, in Europe, and in these United States - - as with one voice they commit to him the Office of the President.....

- - and then the beloved Malvin Lundeen placed around his neck the emblem of the President's Office...and those five or six of us from Saint Luke Church who happened to be present were caught up in that moment because we knew how that Cross came to the Lutheran Church in America - - it's a gift from this one congregation.

But I quickly passed from that as I heard the beloved Malvin Lundeen say to the new President of the Church: "See that thou have not the spirit of fear. Stir up the gift of God within thee, for God has not called thee to the spirit of fear, but to the spirit of the power of love and of a sound mind." Immediately I said to myself, if Robert James Marshall, with all of his capability and his commitment, needs to be stirred anew by the gift of God that's

in him, how much more must we lesser lights, you and I, be stirred anew by the gift of God that's in us!

" - - for God hath not called us to the spirit of fear, but to power and of love and of a sound mind."

So I began to hear the trumpets and I alerted myself for action, and here I stand.

For I know full well that there are those among you who are afraid, afraid to undertake the budget that lies ahead for us. I know that there are those among you who are afraid to part with your substance, for a number of different reasons. I wish I could give you the exact figure of what lies ahead but I can't, for the simple reason that Rod Hader and his committee are simply trying to reduce it to the minimal amount that will remain realistic, so great are the demands thrust upon us.

But this I can tell you, that there ought to be a figure of $10,000 more than last year, a brand new figure, that's going to be our answer to the appeal headed by a former pastor of this congregation in behalf of all the Lutherans in the United States of America who are members of the Lutheran Church in America....

...I also know that from the Maryland Synod of the Lutheran Church in America our apportionment next year may be $5,000 more than last year...

...I also know that next year we ought to have a more complete staff, that we might more adequately meet the needs of our people in this place, that while the greater emphasis will be for the Cause of Christ beyond our doors, yet we ought not to forget the increasing urgency of needs here as well.....

Facing perhaps a possible budget that's 20% higher than last year, one could

be afraid.

But then I was caught up by a verse of Scripture, and had I been uninhibited, when you came in today you would have seen on the walls placards, banners perhaps, and drawings, with a smiling face, and underneath, four words:

"GOD LOVES CHEERFUL GIVERS"

Why don't we smile more often than we do when we think of Jesus Christ? Why don't we smile in that very undramatic moment when the offering is being received, when everybody has part? Why don't we smile? Somebody once said you can tell the vitality of a man's Christian experience, not perhaps by the way he prays, although that's important - - not maybe so much by how often he goes to church, and surely that's important.....but by the way he puts his offering on the plate.

Mrs. Shaheen and I have two sons, as you know, and one of them, being an artist, never signs his name with the three letters that spell his name, but he always draws a face. And sometimes I look at the signature before I read the letter because I can tell by the way the face is drawn as to what his mood and temperament and personality is at that moment.

I'm not here this morning to tell you how much you ought to give, but I am here, by the grace of God, to tell you why you ought to give. I could give you some of the answers that you give me as to why you ought to give...

...some people say we ought to give because we draw benefit from the program - - "why, I wouldn't think of sending my child to Saint Luke Church, that provides Christian education, the youth program, the ministry of music, without assuming my share - - " But I needn't tell you that there are some people who don't assume their share, who draw benefit from the program.

...I could tell you that there are some people who say, "I ought to give because I am a member, and therefore I'll take the grand total of the budget, divide it by the members, and then I'll give my share." I don't have to surprise you by telling you that there are still some who don't meet the average.

...I suppose there are some people who say, "We ought to give because the new President of the Maryland Synod is a member of this congregation - - ....and up to this time, (not speaking vainly) we've been able to set the pace for all the other member congregations of the Synod, and as our member assumes his office we ought to stand with him and encourage him in his home congregation. And this would be a good reason.

But the most wonderful of all reasons, and what prompts a man to give cheerfully, is that he acknowledges himself as one who draws benefit from the grace of God.

Now I've been ahead of myself. Bear with me just a little bit longer. I'm always happiest when I can give to something when I have something to give - - when I've allowed myself a margin. There are times when I go to bed at night when I hope and pray that the phone will not ring, lest you make a demand upon my time to minister to you in your hour of need, because the day has run its course and I'm completely depleted and I haven't allowed for a margin, a reserve, by which to meet a need. Sometimes that margin isn't there because of the unwisdom of the way I have spent the day.

Now take it over to that check-book situation - - I'm always happiest when I know that I've allowed for the margin for the Lord, that it's there. And I'm indebted to dear Mrs. Bannen, the widow of my predecessor, who showed

me her tithe box, and she said, "Raymond, if it doesn't come out first, there will never be enough left." I'm happiest when that tithe is set aside, a margin is being established upon which to draw.

Secondly, I'm always happiest when I'm doing what I'd like to do, and when I'm liking doing what I ought to do. Do I read you the same way, my friend? Aren't all of us happy doing what we'd like to do and when we know we're liking what we ought to do? When I went to Europe for the first time I knew very well that I'd be going to countried where I couldn't speak the language, and I also knew that no matter where I would go, I would be standing as a debtor, because God has made life like that, that there are always people ahead of us to whom we're going to be indebted. And so even before I began to learn to say "Ich bin hungrig" - - I learned:

"Marci" - - "Danke schoen" - - "Gracias" - -

...for God had raised up in front of me all along the journey people who would be doing something for me. Life is like that. Before I appeared on the scene God raised up those on the journey through life to whom I shall be forever indebted - - my parents, waiting to receive me with love - - a Holy Christian Church, waiting to baptize me, to name me as a child of God - - a Church, with all of its faults, still waiting to proclaim the saving grace of Jesus Christ .....and even if you want me to mention this -- read this paper carefully, I beg you, before you sign your pledge tomorrow....

- - the United States of America, where I could be born, for when on occasion I say my prayers at night I thank God for two things: for my baptism as a child of God, and for the fact that when my father came from the Old World, he came all the way to America. His ship might have taken him in the other direction, and this day, were I to have been his

son, I'd be denied so many freedoms, living behind the curtain.

I thank God for so much that's been there waiting for me.

I thank God for you - - who serve for me as stumbling-blocks on the road to Hell. If it were not for your prayers, for your encouragement, for your chastisement - - I wouldn't want to live another day.

She came as a stranger this morning. She met me at the stody door - - she laid bare her soul. I prayed with her. She came, she worshipped at 8:30, I saw her on the way out - - - "Thank you," she said, "I feel so much better." So I hope I'll remember - - smilingly I fill out my pledge card. Who has more reason to be grateful than you and I? - - saved by the grace of God.

I close with one simple illustration. I could turn in many directions in this unsettled world, but out in Haight-Asbury district there is a man, in the name of Jesus Christ who conducts a Toilet Service - - - a toilet service?

...he spends his time going out into the gutters, finding the derelicts, then he talks with them about Jesus Christ, who, in his language, says can send you higher and make you stay up there longer.....and as the Holy Spirit gets a hold on them through him, he invites them to a Toilet Service...where he picks them up and takes them along with him, maybe twelve, into a bathroom. And I can picture them standing there, even in the bath-tub itself. Then there comes a moment when all of them put their powders and their drugs and their pot into the commode, and he flushes it away....and he says, "Now it's gone!..gone!... gone!....in the name of Jesus Christ."

I give cheerfully, gladly, to know that the long arm of the Church stretches out to a person like that. God loves you, my friend - - smile!

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
All Saints' Sunday November 3, 1963

"LIKE A TEAR-WIPER"

I cannot speak for other theological seminaries. I can speak only for the one from which I was graduated, when I tell you that perhaps the professor least appreciated was the professor who headed the Department of Practical Theology. It's an exceedingly difficult thing to tell students, you see, who presumably know everything, just how life is going to be when they leave the classroom behind them and get out into the workaday world, and face problem after problem as they confront person after person.

Harvey Daniel Hoover was our Professor of Practical Theology, and I rise now to declare unashamedly his mark upon the fabric of my heart remains deeply embedded even to this day, and I would hope as long as I live. I don't remember too much that he taught out of the book - - how can any man teach out of the book, practical theology?.....a man can only give a sense of direction, and then turn his students loose, and hope that somehow he has equipped them with a spirit that will make them equal to the occasion as it arises.

I testify to the way in which he helped to equip me. I remember two things in particular. One day he told us about having been called as a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to minister to someone that he had never met before, and a man who was dying -- a man who had suffered a great deal...and lo and behold, when he entered the place he was told that the man could neither speak nor hear -- deaf and dumb, they said. Now, now, does a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ communicate with a man he had never seen before, with a man who could not speak, with a man who could not hear?

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....extraordinarily gifted with a pastor's heart, and an understanding of human nature, and Protestant that he was, he simply went in, touched the hand of the dying man, and then with his other hand made the sign of the Cross...

...as much as to say, "Jesus Christ who died upon the cross, who endured suffering and pain, comforts you now."

The other thing I remember from the classroom situation -- he told us how he went into an undesirable area in Pittsburg, when he shepherded a congregation in the western part of Pennsylvania. He was helping out in a parish while the pastor was away. He was asked to conduct a funeral -- for a woman who had been a prostitute, a rather unsavory character, they said.

... he met the first test: Will I go or won't I go? She's a stranger and I've heard these unsavory things about her. Shall I conduct the funeral or shan't I?

> ...there are some of us still around who believe that we ought never to pass by an opportunity to witness in God's name, even when the situation itself may not be to our liking. And if that possesses my soul today, I owe it to Harvey Daniel Hoover, who inspired me by his answer - -

"Of course I went."

...then the second hurdle: if she was as bad as they said, what should I preach?

> ...and there was the temptation to talk about the wrath of God -- to tell about the way in which God exacts service from us, and how God holds us responsible for the lives that we live....and because He is a God of justice, how He will weigh us in the balances...and the

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despicable thing in the sight of God could be the waste of our years and the instruments for evil that we might become.....he was tempted to talk about the wrath of God, hoping that he might make some dent upon those who might come for her funeral....

..."but," said Harvey Daniel Hoover, "I did not succumb to the temptation to talk about the wrath of God...or to talk about sinners in the hands of an angry God - - I did not go to them to talk about the torments of the damned, the pain of Hell - - Hell she already knew! - - and so did the people who lived around her. As best I could, " said that white-haired professor, "I talked about the love of God -- the love of God that comforts us even when we don't deserve it."

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On this All Saints' Day I salute this man of beloved memory, who has instilled in my heart a desire to preach and to proclaim that God who has written upon the lines of His face compassion and forgiveness. That's why without any hesitation I suggest the title for today's sermon, knowing full well that in the minds of some of you it may have to be defended....to talk about God as a tear-wiper is not fully appreciated by some people. This is soft -- this is a highly subjective way of thinking about God, and surely an emotional way. I told you last September, when I began preaching as we looked forward to the Fall and Winter and Spring schedule, that the sermons for the most part to be preached from this pulpit this year would deal with the basic nature and character of God - - what's He like?

So the conclusion comes very naturally on this All Saints' Day, and as one reads the Epistle for the day, that 17th verse of the 7th chapter of the Book

of the Revelation:

"And God shall wipe away every tear
from their eyes."

So I rise to tell you - - you ask me what God's like.....He's like a tear-wiper. Oh, I realize, if I know anything about the mood and the temper of today, that the God who is "in" is an enangered God. From all quarters we get it now that God's angry with us, because of our inhumanity to one another, and that God just won't stand for our treating one another the way we have been treating one another. The note that's being struck recently is that God is a God of justice, and He's going to see that every man gets what he deserves. In proclaiming that there are preachers who paint for us a God whose face is drawn by lines of anger, and who isn't going to be very merciful with some of us folks who come to church every Sunday, and who allow ourselves to believe that we have a corner on God. In many pulpits today it's being proclaimed that Judgement is going to begin at the House of God, and there are some preachers who delight in making their members squirm...there are some preachers who delight in telling about how many members they've driven from the congregation -- they delight in alienating them from the Body of Christ, because they honestly believe that God is angry with us, and we'd better measure up if we have any integrity at all - - we'd better get squared off with Him before it's too late.

I would do you a disservice, my friend, if I were ever to preach that God is anything less than a God of justice - - He most certainly is. And one of the things that our Blessed Lord kept talking about a great deal toward the end of His time here on earth was about Judgement Day, and how a line would be drawn, and that the One who was seated upon the Throne would make the decision...

...and He talked about a Hell, and He talked about a Heaven. I would do you a disservice if in any sermon that I would preach I would fail to strike that note.

But on the other hand, I would be less than honest and less than fair with my God if I would not talk to you about a God whose arms are outstretched, a God who says, "Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest".....and a God who also says, "Underneath are the everlasting arms".....a God who says, "I will never leave you, I will never forsake you." The God who is "in" these days is an endangered God, but against that I make bold to tell you that there are lines of love written upon His face, that there are those who came to the end of their years clinging tenaciously, as their only hope, that one day they would meet a God who would wipe away all tears from their eyes.

There are those who tell me that this is too emotional, and I should steer clear of this kind of preaching. I don't know that I'd give much for any person who will not on occasion allow his emotions to show. I don't know that I'd want to trust a person who could be in such perfect control. I don't know that I could respect a person who never knew what it was to cry. I keep my ear to the ground when I reflect upon this generation. I recall that I read in a newspaper article when a contender for his party's nomination for the high office of President "strode into a New Hampshire town with the slow gait of a priest" ...every time I ever heard him speak he had marvelous control of himself. He succeeded in getting a significant following of those who were young....one of the most salutary things, I said to myself, about him was when they discovered that he did not get his party's nomination - - that there were news reports that said they cried.

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But there are those who tell me that crying is out, it's no longer in style. God is pictured for us as a tear-wiper. Now I'll grant you, my friend, this sermon, soon to be concluded, will have no meaning for you if you've never reached a point in life where you felt you could not go on any farther, and where, if you could do it, you'd simply cry your heart out, for any one of a number of different reasons...

...at an unexpected turn in the road -- the diagnosis comes back: inoperable cancer...

...without any warning whatsoever, it's <u>your</u> teenager who goes berserk...

...without any warning whatsoever, it's your teenager who runs away, and you haven't the slightest notion where he is ...without seemingly any cause in your mind...

...there are those who delight in misunderstanding -- who cling tenaciously to their mis-judgement of you, to say nothing of those who would wilfully abuse you. The Apostle Peter has a great statement in one of his writings when he talks about those who "do evil and suffer for it, as over against those who do <u>good</u> and suffer for it" because, he implies, that they will know the comfort of God.

....you haven't begun to live, my friend, if you haven't discovered that the burden on your back is more than you can carry. And you haven't discovered all that God waits to give you unless you've found Him as one who comforts and consoles.

In the Book of the Revelation God is pictured as one who wipes away the tears from the eyes of those who have endured <u>great tribulation</u> - - be steadfast,

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my friend, this is what God waits to give those who go through trial and tribulation....but on the other hand, I also know that for those who are truly penitent, despite the fact that they have lived foolish and stupid lives, God also, in the time of their awakening, will wipe away the tears from their eyes.

I want to tell you about Coventry Patmore, who pictured for us a man who had lost his wife, and after her death he discovered that he had to be both father and mother to a growing child...not an easy assignment. One night it was more than he could carry. In his unwisdom and in his impatience he sent his boy to bed without his supper. Troubled by this kind of rebuke that he had given his child, he went up later in the evening and entered the child's bedroom.....and there he discovered that the child's pillow was wet from his crying. There alongside of his bed he had put some things...

...like a sea-shell...an old coin...some objects that were dear to him, and evidently he had fingered them and somehow tried to bring a measure of comfort until he fell asleep.....

Coventry Patmore looked at that child, and realized how he had cried himself to sleep. And then out of pity he looked upon his child who had misbehaved, with much love, and he said, "If I, a human being, can do this for a child who is misbehaving, and be moved to compassion, how much more shall my Heavenly Father look upon me, in my stupidity, in my wilfullness - - the blessed hope - - "And God shall wipe away every tear - - "

...don't be afraid to cherish the thought. It could hold you in good stead.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Twenty-Second Sunday After Trinity November 10, 1968

"- - LIKE AN UNFORGIVING FATHER"

Robert Frost, bless his soul, had something, didn't he, when he said, "There are some things that we must keep for unfinished business." Whatever else he may have meant by that, we know full well what some of us mean by it - - a measure of encouragement, that should we come to the end of our years, maybe the prospect will have to remain that there are some things we never quite got done.

For what it may be worth to you, let me tell you that I know already some of the things that I'll never get done. Quite incidentally, of course, it's this desire of mine to take notebook in hand a visit cemetery after cemetery and record some of the strange things that most certainly are to be found upon the ancient markings.

Already I have some things that I could put down, and surely I have sermonic material galore....

...if I were to visit that cemetery outside York, Pennsylvania, I'd want to stop very reverently at the gravesite of that good man of God, the Rev. Dr. Joseph B. Baker - - every inch a devoted shepherd...a good pastor...a good administrator...a good preacher...a man in love with life. They tell me that on his gravestone are these words:

THANK YOU, GOD, FOR EVERYTHING

...you see, he made his exit gratefully.

...when I was experiencing a measure of hazing when I was at Susquehanna, by the fraternity, I had to go out to the cemetery to the western end of

town - - I can see it now, the marker:

ROSCOE C. NORTH
55 Years Cashier,
First National Bank, Selinsgrove

...as though he wanted to send his qualifications ahead of him, perchance....

...the one that I find rather intriguing here in this area is when I drive through Rock Creek Cemetery. There's the elaborate marker, in quotes:

"CALL ME HARRY"

...as though he didn't want to miss the roll call in Heaven above, and most certainly to have the name that he'd recognize be used...

...as significant as any, perhaps, is the one designed by a man who said, "Put my name on the marker, then the date of my birth...and before you put the date of my death, be sure you engrave these words:

Between these two dates, he lived - - "

- - for this is the measure of a man's life, that he should live out the days of his years. For haven't some of us known some people who were dead long before they breathed their last, and wasn't the youngster absolutely right when she said to a man, "May you live all the days of your life"?

Now the one that gets the prize, at least at this writing - - in a cemetery outside New York City, is a perfectly blank marker except for one word -- no name is given, no date of birth, no date of death....just one word:

FORGIVEN

Quickly the wheels turn, don't they, as a student of human nature, and you ask

yourself, what a story I could write on the basis of that word - - what it doesn't suggest! - -

...a man? ...a woman? ...a son? ...a daughter?

...an unfaithful husband? ...a wayward wife?

...a prodigal son?

...at any rate, the person had chosen the word wisely, for when it's all said and done, this is the only word that you and I can really cherish when we come to the end of our years, to know ourselves as one having been forgiven. For the entrance to Heaven is for only those who are the Forgiven - - did you know that? There's only one group in Heaven, absolutely only one group, and that group is known as the Forgiven. Every single person who ever gets to Heaven gains entrance just because he's been able to claim forgiveness at the hand of God.

What is there distinguishing about this "naked ape" - - for so sometimes we refer to man - - what is there distinguishing about us? Oh, the answers come quickly...

..he is homo sapiens -- he's the thinking person

..then there are those who say, he's the person who can laugh....he's the one who can suffer vicariously

...his distinguishing mark is that he can pray....

For what it may be worth to you, I suggest to you this morning that his mark of distinction is that of all created things, aside from the fact that he's made in the image of God, is the fact that he's able to forgive. That goes hand-in-hand with the fact that we're made in God's image, for God's basic nature and character is love.....and the highest expression of love is forgiveness.

This sermon rightfully falls in its place in the series being preached from this pulpit for the most part this year on the basic nature and character of God. What is He like?

Last Sunday we pulled out all the stops, as far as humanly possible, as far as this preacher is concerned - - striking the note that God is a God of love. This is a fundamental Christian truth, it's the unique aspect of the Gospel of God as revealed through Jesus Christ - - that God loves us, and the highest expression of love is forgiveness.

Forgive me for the moment, won't you, if I wax unusually appreciative of the note that was struck by that young preacher when I heard him preach for the very first time from this sacred desk.....when with bated breath I waited to hear what he would say, what note he would strike. And he said, "I suppose the three most wonderful words that a man can ever use: "I forgive you.'"

But now we come to the Gospel lesson for the day, which is a lesson in forgiveness, but has a very unusual ending. But let's now go to the beginning. It was triggered by a question that Peter asked our Blessed Lord - - "Lord, how often should I forgive my brother?"....and then, being rather proud of himself, and surely pleased, he said something about "seven times?"

> ...my friend, you have no idea what a giant-like stried Peter had taken when he suggested the possibility of forgiving somebody seven times. For according to ancient Jewish tradition, even as taught by the rabbis, the man need be forgiven only three times, and for a fourth offence there is no forgiveness. That was almost a semi-official proclamation...and having stemmed myself from near-Eastern stock, I know something of their nature and their personalities. Even though it is from the Near East and

and the Middle East that our three religions have sprung - - Judaism, Mohammadanism and Christianity....and even for them religion is a way of life, it's not necessarily a way of forgiveness. They're a proud breed of people, as evidenced, of course, in the Mandelbaum Gate - - two nations existing side by side, and one of them at least absolutely refusing to believe that the other is there! And that was characteristic of their relations with one another. If the one had been hurt, if they could not hurt the other in return, then the next thing, and they considered it rather salutary - - they ignored the person who had done the hurting. ...and that is pretty much true of a great number of them even to this day.....so I suggest to you that this is quite a miracle on the part of Peter, that he should come and talk in terms of forgiveness at all - - - what a giant-like stride he had taken. Surely something of the love of Jesus Christ had begun to rub off on him. So in that giant-like stride - - " -- seven times?"

...and then our Blessed Lord said to him, "Peter - - "

...instead of patting him on the back, He said:

"Peter, it's seventy times seven."!

In this whole business of being a Christian, this is an open-ended thing - you just don't reach the point where you turn it off, for God's love is not like a controlled spigot. So far, so good.

And you and I are happy in the thought that God's forgiveness is unending. Who wouldn't be thrilled at the prospect of knowing that it's never going to be too late to get something from God that's good? But our Blessed Lord happened to tell him a story, and to illustrate his fundamental principle of forgiveness, He talked about somebody who was forgiven...but then in turn did not become a

forgiving person....and then our Blessed Lord said:

> "So likewise our Heavenly Father will do to every one of you who from his heart does not forgive his brother."

...so at a sudden turn in the road we're turned from the picture of a God as a forgiving father to the picture of God as an unforgiving father. And that, too, is part of the story.

God like an unforgiving father? Whence this role on the part of God?

...what determines the fact that suddenly He becomes unforgiving?

Even in this whole matter of love as far as God is concerned, He practices, if you please, an economy. God, with His gloriously extravagant gestures toward us, wants every gesture to count. And He gives us love only in order that we might become loving; He gives us forgiveness only in order that we might become forgiving.....and as soon as we are no longer forgiving we remove ourselves from those who have received forgiveness at the hand of God to the textent that we enjoy its full benefit.

There are a lot of people who don't understand this. They don't understand what forgiveness is.

As an example: forgiveness is not simply taking away a punishment. I may forgive a wayward child for his waywardness, but if I am a good father I must exact a penalty. Forgiveness is not just taking away a penalty by way of punishment. God isn't that stupid!

...for what it may be worth to you, my sister, my oldest sister, was married to a man who died a drunkard's death. She forgave him...and I have reason to believe that he sought forgiveness from God's hand and was forgiven, but that did not mean that he escaped cirrhosis of the

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liver. To forgive is not simply to take away the punishment.

To forgive is not simply to say, I will no longer remember. If you've taught me anything, you've taught me how easy it is to go on remembering....so stained are we by original sin, that some of us are not just about to give up the thing that's hurt us. Like Linus and his blanket, it's the only security that some of us have! It's a peculiar brand of security that I have by nursing my wound, that you afflicted.....but if I have to give up my hurt, what do I have to talk about? - - what ground do I have to stand on?

...I can well understand what you say to me in the counselling session - - "Pastor, I can forgive, but I'm not so sure I can forget"

...and I'm not so sure that you can forget, and the trouble does not lie in your not being able to forget; the trouble lies in the way we remember - - that's the problem. Even God remembers our past, but the important thing is in the way He remembers it. And He does not lay the charge of our sin against us any longer...He looks upon us as the redeemed and the forgiven, and the restored.

It also must be said that in this whole matter of forgiveness, that somewhere along the line, if it's to become effective, somebody has to initiate it, somebody has to take the first step. Praise be to God, forgiveness was His idea. He came to us; we didn't go to Him. Heaven came to earth; earth didn't go to Heaven. And you and I would never enjoy what we so fully cherish if God had not taken the first step.

Of course, it was a risk! And more often than He'd like to admit, if one may use this figure of speech, God gambled and lost! It's the nature of love

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to risk - - the divine risk. The precious thing about His forgiveness is that so often He forgives in order that we might repent.

...so strangely different for us - - "Not until he mends his ways - - "

..."Not until I get him to his knees, will I forgive."

...God doesn't talk to us like that.

They tell me that Andrew Jackson, that very colorful of Presidents, a very zesty character, once came to a preacher and said, "I'd like to join your church." That very able man of God said, "And you know that when you join the Church you're expected to practice the Christian religion and to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ - - that the heart of the Gospel is love and forgiveness? Now, Mr. President - - "....so the story goes, " - - do you forgive your enemies?"

> ...after some hesitation: "I forgive those who fought against me in the field of battle.....I even forgive some of my political enemies... .....but I'm not so sure that I can forgive those who spoke slander against my wife!"

..."I'm sorry, Sir, you must be able to forgive everyone."

He did join the church eventually.

I say this to you out of love - - I wonder how long the roster of this congregation might be if, by the authority of God himself, I should be as exacting as that preacher!

Now I want to close with what is for me a very interesting story. Two well-known radio-TV commentators used it last year.....

...in Nazi Germany there is a man who has been in prison for some twenty years,

having been found builty by the War Crime Trials at Nurnberg. Those twenty hears had done something to him and he was truly sorry for his cooperation with the Nazis. He recognized the guilt that rested upon his soul because he was instrumental in annihilating one entire village, out of pure reprisal.

...in anticipation of his court trial he hoped that they would know in advance how remorseful he was, and he sent word out to a certain village and said: "As a people, will you forgive me?"

...he made known to them how sorry

he was....he came to them as a penitent....

There was a strange reaction to his request.

They said, "We will take a vote on it." And they took a vote on a Sunday when people came to Mass. When the vote was made known, there wasn't a single person who said he should be forgiven.....yet they are the ones who came to Mass, and knew the full benefit of God's forgiveness.....and they were the ones who, having come to Mass, prayed the "Our Father - - forgive, as we forgive - -

But brace yourself, my friend, for you and I must ask the question-of-questions that remains.....

...granted, now, they did not forgive him

- - would he be able to forgive those

who would not forgive him?

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Twenty-sixth Sunday After Trinity November 17, 1968

A DAY OF HUMILIATION AND PRAYER

Those of us who had the good fortune of knowing Dr. Robert J. Marshall before he was named to become the President of the Lutheran Church in America had an exceedingly high regard for his Christian commitment and his faithfulness to Jesus Christ. The full measure of the man, however, was very clearly seen by some of us when what might be recognized as his first official action was a call to prayer of the entire Lutheran Church in America.

Immediately some of us said, this is the posture of the man, he begins his administration on his knees, and he invites all those who are his constituent members to do the same thing. Let me read for you now what appeared on the front page of this week's MESSENGER - -

" The new President of the Lutheran Church in America, Dr. Robert J. Marshall, in a special communication to all pastors of our Church has written . .

> 'Several letters to me have suggested a special call to prayer. No one could deny that events require all the power of people and providence if the usual order of creation is to befriend mankind in nature and in society. In your own time and manner your conscience drives you in faith to seek from our Heavenly Father strength for obedience. Moreover, the church is regularly reminded to unite in prayer by the service of worship.
>
> Yet these are times which imprint upon our lives the special need for resources to transcend human frailty and animosity. My own thoughts turned to the tradition in some places to observe a day of humiliation and prayer toward the end of the church year. This has been a year of horrendous events and major decisions. Assassinations and deaths, elections in the church and in the nation, crises at home and abroad, Vietnam, Nigeria, Czechoslovakia, these and much besides would direct our continual repentance toward specific confession and our constant faith toward special works.

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> Upon the advice of the Commission on Worship I recommend that Sunday, November 17, be observed as a day of humiliation and prayer . . . ' "

I submit to you at this point, that in the almost thirty years that I have been privileged to go to a sacred desk, if my memory serves me aright, this is the first time that the President of the Church has called us to observe a day of humiliation and prayer. In anticipation of meeting with you, then, on this next-to-the-last Sunday of the church year, I thought to myself - - if, having read this in the MESSENGER, if I were to have greeted you this morning as you came to church, and I would have said to you, "I'm glad you came, because as you come today we're observing, in response to the President of the Church, a day of humiliation and prayer - - ".....what might have been your reaction?

- - it could have been that some of you would have given me a perfectly blank expression, as much as to say, I don't quite understand what you mean....or perchance, "Well I just couldn't care less, Pastor - - a day of humiliation and prayer? - - I neither understand it, nor am I inclined to understand it"

- - or there might be some of you, if I were to have greeted you this way, saying that it's good to have you come to this day of humiliation and prayer - - in all honesty you might have said to me, "Well, Pastor, what's so special about that? In the years that you have been with us, if you haven't done anything at all, you've drilled into our minds that every Sunday when we come we begin on our knees, that so'called 'item on the agenda' of every worship service, as we turn to this magnificent liturgy,

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is the confession of sins....why, you're always reminding us that we're sinners to the day that we die! - - - what's so special about a day of humiliation and prayer? - - this is what I was expected to do when I came today - - "

- - or knowing human nature as I do, it could be that in equal honesty and candor, some of you might have rebelled, and said, "If you think I've come here to get on my knees and confess the sins of other people, you're mistaken, Pastor, because if I could have my way in an unguarded fashion in the presence of God, I'd complain, because this is a sick world, and I've been contaminated by it. I had my dreams of a better world - - and haven't I tried to work toward a better world?.... ...and I should live so long as this! - - when I'd aimed for a plateau of security, and this is a time of unsettlement, hostility. If I had an unguarded moment before God, I'd complain."

...well, you know whether or not I've assessed the mind and the mood of each one of you as you've come here today. I have no choice in allegiance to him who is the chief bishop of our Church. I've invited you to mark this as a day of humiliation and prayer.

Oddly enough, the invitation came weeks and months after we had scheduled the hymns for the day, these hymns with a triumphant note that we've been singing - - they were enlisted some early week in September, and we weren't about to change them. Because even as we mark this as a day of humiliation and prayer, for the Christian there is always the element of courage and hope.

Now let me back-track for a moment or two. For every man eventually there is the moment of truth. And when the moment of truth arrives, this will be the posture of man: the bowed head, the bended knee. For no man in the moment of

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truth can ever allow himself to believe that he has made the most of his opportunities and has given God a good return for the investment that God has made in him. When the moment of truth arrives, the posture of man is the bowed head, the bended knee. For I say to you with all the ardor of my soul, that a man comes to his knees in either one of two ways - - voluntarily, or the forces and factors of life itself are such that they are dragging a man to a near-prostrate position. So characteristically, then, we come to mark this day of humiliation and prayer.

I shall not take your time, nor mine, to enumerate for you all the forces of evil that have been at work in this world that have brought us to this time of unsettlement. If we wanted to, I could build in your behalf an excellent case that this could be described as the worst of times, and that would be enough to make any man be chastened and rebuked by that good Biblical statement: "Judgement is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord."

But there ought to be a text for this occasion, and oddly enough the text - - it comes to me from my reading these days. I have been reading the writings of Paul, and then every now and then I put it aside and I go back to the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. But there was that itinerant tent-mender-turned-preacher, who lived in what he might have referred to as the "worst of times".....yet in that unsettled period Christianity grew and developed and blossomed. And once he made this magnificent utterance:

> "All things work together for good to them who love the Lord . .

- - what! - - a text like that on a day of humiliation and prayer? Of course. Because we must be reminded that God's purpose is always good, and God's pur-

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pose remains as it works toward fulfillment.

When God made the world He called it good. When God made us He stamped us with Him image, and He said we were made for goodness. Whatever is of God is never lost. Nature has a way of reminding us of this, that there is a purpose that must be fulfilled. When we were in India they used to tell us about a kind of a plant that you would stick in the ground and nurture it and make sure it would grow.....and then in impish-like manner, some of the peasants would put a stick not too far distant from it, and they'd wait to see that plant grow toward that stick...no matter where they moved the stick, the plant had a way of finding the stick - - in much the same way that you put a plant, orientation is always going to set in, the plant will always respond toward the sun. There is a purpose that must be fulfilled.

Somebody once referred to a swallow as "two-and-one-half ounces of courage" - - it's perched upon a telegraph wire....with its 2 1/2 ounces of courage it can soar through the heavens thousands of miles.....and then one day, as its purpose seems to be fulfilled, will perch there on the eaves of a chapel roof . . .

When we lived in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, we never tired of what we continually refer to as the "hills of home." There was the Bald Eagle range of the Alleghenies right behind us on the south side of the river...majestic. One day we were greatly distraught to learn that the Pennsylvania Power and Light Company was going to cut a giant-like swathe across the side of the mountain to lay a new line. Nothing that we could do could stop it, there was no other way, and how hurt and crushed we were when we looked up and saw that rigid, stark, severe, barren stretch.....but lo and behold, you know what

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happened come spring - - it was covered with a blanket of green! - - and the swathe was blotted out, as even nature says, our purposes, too, must be fulfilled. Said the Apostle Paul, God's purpose of goodness must be fulfilled.

So now, on this day of humiliation, I rise to ask, do you believe with the Apostle Paul that there is this goodness at work in the world? Or might you be like Bertrand Russell, who once wrote:

"Brief and powerless is man's life;
On him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls.
Pitiless and dark, blind to good and evil,
restless of destruction,
Omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way;
For man, condemned today to lose his dearest,
Tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness."

....not so, says the Apostle Paul - - it's good, come wind or weather - - it is good.

Said the Quaker poet:

"I know not where his islands lift
their fronded palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
beyond His loving care.

To one fixed thing my spirit clings,
I know that God is good."

Granted you will accept that now, this is the question on this day of humiliation and prayer: are we on God's side or not? It's the sober realization that perhaps we have not been on God's side as often as we should have been that brings us to our knees. The church is always reminding us not only of the evil that we have done, but the good that remains undone. On a day of humiliation we are reminded that God's eternal purpose is at work. Am I His agent of goodness and reconciliation or not?

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Let me close with a very simple illustration. There was a distinguished young man who had completed his work for his doctorate of philosophy degree and was awarded it. Those who knew him spoke only of a future rich in promise. Name the field - - it was certain that he would have excelled....as a scientist, a remarkable researcher....as an educator, an outstanding teacher...as a philosopher, an excellent thinker. In celebration of his newly awarded doctorate he went on holiday....

...and while he was on holiday he went out with a company of people who went to a lake where they were bathing. Word had come that there was someone out on the lake drowning....(I should tell you at this point that the person who was drowning was classified as an idiot - - he was born into life, as we might say, short-changed, not normal, never able to live out to his fullest capacity). The young man whose future was bright with promise, realizing that someone was drowning, went to the rescue. The idiot was saved. The man who accomplished the rescue lost his life in the endeavor. The man whose future was rich in promise -- wiped out of the scene.....the idiot remained, and remained an idiot to the day that he died.

The amazing thing is that no one who knew about the incident, no one said he shouldn't have done it. Praise be to God that in this world there is this influence for good which is always on the side of rescuing life. This is God's great endeavor - - to save, to heal, to restore.

On this day of humiliation, each of us could be brought to the Bar of Judgement when the question that we must confront is: Are we agents of goodness, endeavoring to rescue, or not?

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(this sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Last Sunday After Trinity November 24, 1968

"LIKE A BRIDEGROOM COMING"
(Matthew 25:1-13)

It wasn't one girl, but ten, bless their souls, who caught the Preacher's eye on that occasion. For the wandering carpenter's-son-turned-preacher gathered material for His sermons wherever He could. The disciples who followed Him, however, looked upon some of these things in a rather cursory manner, but not Jesus. Whatever the incident, whatever the occasion, whatever the interaction between personalities, He had a way of linking it up with eternal truth. He seemed forever to be the kind of a person who felt a sermon coming on, and if perchance He did not preach on the spot, in the recesses of His mind He allowed the thing to register until one day He would apply the truth fervently.

This is the prefatory statement by which I greet you as I reflect now upon the Gospel lesson for this day, the last Sunday in the church year. Perchance now you'll recall the Gospel lesson. It's one of the most detailed stories that Jesus ever told. Let's begin all over again - - the story about ten girls that caught the Preacher's eye.

> ...not just any group of ten girls, but ten particular girls. They were bridesmaids. They had been especially chosen to participate in a gala occasion....for in the monotonous drab life of the Middle East, it was a wedding that was the bright spot in the life of a community -- it was time for rejoicing.....those who lived lives of the disadvantaged and the deprived counted themselves unusually fortunate if they could be invited to a wedding.....and especially so if they could be included among the participants.

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The bridesmaids in Oriental weddings had a particular assignment. They weren't just to walk down an aisle and surround the bride and the groom, but rather they were to wait until the bridegroom appeared, and then they were to escort him to the home of the bride. Now that sounds all very simple....but really it was quite a complicated matter. ...because you and I must remember that life in the East is not like life in the West. Kipling was absolutely right when he said, "East is East and West is West"...and anybody who has lived in the East and who has traveled and spent time there knows the tremendous adjustment that has to be made...

...for one thing, as an example, they do not live by the wrist-watch. Time is of little consequence. They have all the time in the world. Because this is true, no exact hour for the wedding was ever announced - - you never knew precisely when it was going to take place....you only knew that a wedding had been announced....

...now as over against that, these bridesmaids were expected to be ready, at any moment, no matter when it might come, even though they did not know when....they were to be ready.

...now weddings in the East take place at night, and no one ought to be found on the street unless he has some kind of a lighted torch...and part of the responsibility of the bridesmaids was to form a torchlight procession.....

.....now at once you recognize the fact that there ought to be a sufficient amount of oil so that when the bridegroom appears the procession can begin without delay.....and this is the thing that caught the eye of the Preacher - - <u>five</u> of those ten girls were shrewd and

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had enough foresight to know that maybe the bridegroom might be delayed for an unexpected amount of time....and as over against that they made the necessary preparation, they brought along an ample supply of oil.....

....according to Oriental custom, if your torch would not be lighted, you could not be in the procession.....and if you were not in the especially chosen procession, you could not be admitted to the wedding ceremony nor to the celebration. It was quite a penalty that was exacted, but that was the custom.

....so this carpenter's-son-turned-preacher makes much of the fact, as you recognize the Scriptural way of putting it - - five were wise, and five were foolish.

Now what's the central thrust of His sermon? What is the theme that He lays hold upon as He speaks to people now?

Oh, you recognize it at once as "Be Prepared." Well anyone could talk like that, anyone could recognize the theme and talk about any phase of life as a kind of thing that's prefatory for the next stage. But Jesus was not just a moralist. Anybody could stand up and say, "Well now, I want you to know that you never know what's going to be around the corner, and you ought to get ready for it." Jesus didn't spend His time telling people things that somebody else could tell them. But rather He was motivated to discharge His obligation to do the thing for which He was uniquely sent, and that was to introduce the God-element into the story.

He knew full well that people live by what they anticipate. Anybody could tell you that. That's a simplistic reading of life - - we all live by

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what we anticipate, by what we expect. And this is the sad commentary that's written about some people's lives when we're told they just don't have anything to look forward to any more - - so the spring in the step goes away, and there's no song in the heart. We live by what we expect - - we live by our anticipations.

Be patient with me, now, while I detail it for you - - you can well afford to have it spelled out...any set of parents know full well what it is to live by expectation....look at the child in our midst:

...we deal with the infant and anticipate when he will crawl

...once that step has been accomplished, we look forward to the stage when he will walk....

...we live by the expectation when no matter how awkwardly, he'll take that hand of his and feed himself, or take those two hands and clasp the cup or the glass...

...we live by our expectation of the first word that he will speak...

...we live by our anticipation of his first day in school, his mastery of the multiplication table....

...we live by our anticipation of the fact that he'll be able to form good and complete sentences....

...we live in the anticipation that he will be graduated....

...we live by our anticipation that one day he will meet someone....

...we live by our anticipation of his first job.....

...let me detail it for you as meticulously as all that!.....because a man continues to live by his expectations.

Sometimes I think that's the unhappy thing that we have to say about

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youth today - - they don't anticipate much. There's nothing in the future that lays hold upon them and draws them. But yet, for the Christian, he lives by what we refer to as the "blessed hope."

I don't do it as often as I would like, and surely not as often as I should - - steal away from this parish to head for the hills of home, if for no other reason than to visit my father in his declining years. When I saw him this week, this 90-year-old soul, with that stout heart of his he could live for another decade....but even in this declining period of his life the element of expectation remains, that one day God will come and take him away.....the expectation that he will be made free from all the misery of this world, he who was so active. It fairly tears the heart out of any person to look back and remember what they were in their prime - - now to see them in the declining period. Yet even in this time of his life there is still the element of expectation that God will take him. So we live by what we expect.

Now this is the element that Jesus Christ introduces into this parable. He says, live by what you can expect in the future. Is that what He says? Not precisely.....because He knows full well that you and I do not know what it is that lies ahead of us. No one can predict what it is. There's something to which I cling tenaciously at year's end. It keeps bobbing back again upon the horizon of my mind, when I think of a brand new year. I do not know what the future has in hand, but I know the One in whose hand the future is held. So if you read this parable carefully, Jesus -- God-come-to-us, is not talking so much about what's coming as He's talking about who is coming - - underline that carefully - - "Behold, the bridegroom comes - go ye out to meet him."

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Let me put it for you this way: there's a man in your future, my friend, there's a man in the future of every one of us - - the God-Man, that is. He's most certainly coming. So our Blessed Lord, if you want to read the parable this way carefully, likens Himself to the bridegroom - - He is coming. That in essence is this message, but now it has to be interpreted in a Christian sense. Someone's coming in the future.

By intimation, some weeks ago, I told you how I used to squirm a bit uncomfortably when I would read those roadside signs, those that had a religious connotation - - "PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD". Now that I've reached the age that I have and know that the fact of death, sudden death, could be an ever-present reality, those words register. For always in the future there is the inescapable fact of God. Some of us do our best to try to make people conscious of the fact that <u>in the present moment</u> there is the inescapable fact of God. But some of us have a way of <u>ignoring</u> the past, some of us have a way of becoming ostrichlike as far as the present moment is concerned, and if we have any kind of success at all in this kind of maneuvering, the one thing that we can't escape is the <u>future</u> - - and in the future God is written largely.

There is of course, for every man, the moment of truth. And in that moment of truth he stands either as prepared or unready to face the inescapable demand. For life has a way of confronting us with the <u>exacting</u> moment. Of course it's a time of crisis, and the time to prepare for a crisis is always beforehand. That means, then, that every single hour of our existence is important and it must be seen in essence as preparatory for all that is yet and most certainly to come. So Jesus, the carpenter's-son-turned-preacher, with an eye on these ten girls, weaves them into a story of eternal truth. And He says, "Five of them were made

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ready when the bridegroom came, and five were unprepared."

Now the point that the Preacher is making is this: the bridegroom is going to come, and only the prepared ones can be with Him.

There's a note here that needs to be struck in this parable that sometimes you and I forget - - the bridegroom intimated a glad and a glorious and a gala occasion. I go back to what I told you earlier -- it was the bright spot in the life of all the people in the Middle East. Nothing was happier than a wedding celebration. When you and I are getting ready for God, Jesus Christ who likened himself to the bridegroom - - why not register at that point, that we're getting ready for a glad and glorious and gala occasion.

Of course, because we're sinners that we are, and delight in our sinning, we can be stricken by guilt and not anticipate with joy God's appearance. But the answer to that is - - have done with your sinning and anticipate the joy of His appearing. The hymn that we sang was "Rejoice all ye believers."

George Buttrick used to tell the story about a man who had a mission in a distant city.....and while he was there he behaved as he should not have behaved. (Now you can fill in as you see fit).....as he's returning on the train he's guilt-stricken, and as he nears the station closest to his own home, he suddenly discovers that he's being paged - - his name is being called out. Trembling with guilt, he identifies himself, only to discover that his wife, who dearly loves him, thought to surprise him by coming on the train and riding the short distance from the next-to-the-last stop - - all the way with him. God is coming our way. He delights to greet us, as we continue on our

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pilgrimage. He wants to escort us all the way safely Home, He wants to bring us on our way. Prepare for Him in this way, my friend, know the joy that comes in His appearing.

Why can't we strike that accent? Most of us have a way of preparing for the unpleasant and the ugly. It may take a bit of doing, but it's a far greater thing to make ready for the wonderful that's bound to happen. I'm indebted for this piece of advice that I like to pass on: "Some day, young man, you'll meet a perfectly wonderful woman - - get ready for her now." If one can say this to a human being about a human being, how much more so can we remember the words of the carpenter's-son-become-preacher - - "One day you'll meet God."

- - let it be the grand and glorious thing that God intends it to be, for, said Jesus Christ, trying to make plain to us the basic nature and character of God - -

"He's like a bridegroom.....and He's coming."

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The First Sunday in Advent December 1, 1968

"ADVENT: THE CHALLENGER"
(Judges 13:8)

For some people, anything new is always challenging. There's something stimulating and exciting about reaching for a new book, going to a new place, making a new friend, trying out a new product, being confromted by a new idea. The patron saint for some people could be, if one were to indulge in patron saints, that elevator operator, in New York's Hotel Taft.....he started out early in the morning whistling, humming a gay tune. Said a certain chap who boarded the elevator on his way to the coffee shop, "What makes you whistle so brightly this morning, and so early in the day?" Immediately the elevator operator replied, "Well man, this is a new day - - I've never had this day before!" There are people like that, who when they greet the new day, recognize it as something exciting, stimulating, and challenging.

On the other hand, there are those who find anything new less than sanguine. They may find anything new rather threatening - - the man who discovers he's going to have a new boss, threatened by the fact that this new boss might evaluate him, he might not be nearly as charitable as the old one, and surely a bit more authoritarian.....

...there are some people who shy away from any opportunity to meet a new person - - they're uncomfortable, they're far more secure with an old friend....

...there are some folks who can't at all become excited about visiting a new place, they shy away from it....

....and heaven only knows what happens to some people when they're confronted by a new idea.....

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Today the Church begins a new year. And one of the members in the choir was absolutely right when he greeted me this morning and he said to me, "Happy new year, Pastor." For today is the First Sunday in Advent, and Advent, these four Sundays before Christmas, serves to make us acquainted with something that was brand new in the mind of God. For Christmas must be understood essentially as a brand new idea - - God had never tried anything out like it before in the human race.

Oh, since the dawn of creation, He'd been busy doing this thing or doing that, and trying to curb and to correct the children that He had created - - He'd resort to such things as the giving of a Law, dealing in such things as:

...famine, plague, flood, pestilence.....

....for a number of generations He had been kept busy reaching for such people as: patriarchs....prophets....priests....judges

....kings....a law-giver.....

Now in His wisdom it was made plain to Him that He'd have to try something brand new.....and the emphasis can well be upon brand, because it was a brand name that God had in mind, and His own name would be uniquely connected with it.

In Christmas He tried out something brand new in the human race - - He decided to come Himself, in the form of a baby - - a direct divine invasion - - God breaking through to us! As though God himself realized that He simply had to corner our attention, as though it was made crystal clear to the divine mind that now something had to be done that would command man's attention. So God challenges us as He comes to us in Jesus Christ.

But for a moment may I remind you that all of life is a kind of challenge. Any man who has begun to live at all, in any degree of depth, knows that life is just one series of challenges after another. Some people, unfortunately, can

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never stand up to a challenge. Some people can never face anything new - - a new problem, a new situation. Sometimes they endeavor to pretend that it isn't there. The folly of man perhaps is never as pronounced as when he thinks he can become ostrichlike and ignore what life is pressing upon him.

...some people recognizing the fact that they can't possibly ignore it, try to evade it, to avoid it, to delay the time of confrontation. And in the process, they resort to all kinds of unfortunate things - - they use crutches, the use of drugs, as an example - - the use of alcohol, or maybe resorting to an illicit relationship with another person, whereby they can escape the world of reality. And they never succeed. The challenge remains, and life has a way of pressing in upon us.

If there's one thing that you and I ought to be able to say about God, He's never about to be put off. He may take His time, He may deal in a variety of ways in making His entree into your direction, and because we are so stained and soiled by original sin, we may not be able to discern His appearing, but He can't be put off. And eventually the supreme challenge that a man must face will be confronting Him, if not now, later. The one thing that you and I may have to say about God is this: He just won't be put off forever.

And whenever God comes, it's always with the element of challenge: What are you going to do about it?

Well this is what life itself says, but God's challenge is somewhat different. God not only says, What are you going to do about it? - - but God says, "I challenge you to do something worthwhile about it!" - - and that's something entirely different. It's one thing to be challenged to do something,(and this in itself might be an invitation to do evil) if it's something that ought to be

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done, but God's challenge is always to do something worthwhile.

I'm not at all unmindful of the fact that it could be that at this point some of us may get hung up, particularly when we concentrate upon the fact that now, that in this brand new idea of God, He comes to us in the form of a baby. It's not that I would bring your faith to the breaking point, friend, God forbid. My role is to encourage faith, not to discourage it. But the question must be dealt with: did He or didn't He? That is - - did God actually come to us in the form of a baby?

Honestly now, you and I must admit that we can neither prove nor disprove the fact nor any of the so-called God-facts. (and when I say prove, I mean in the scientific sense). In the final analysis we either believe or disbelieve. And after a while (it really may take a little longer for some folks than for others) it may dawn upon us that there's a far more blessed challenge about believing something as over against proving something. For in this whole matter of believing things about God, the element of positive trust must be introduced. When God comes our way, the first thing that He's always asking us to do, even perhaps before we are encouraged to obey Him, is to believe Him. And if He makes much of the fact that we ought to obey Him, it's only that in and through obedience we might learn what it is to believe Him and to trust Him. So God puts before us the great challenge as He comes to us in the form of a baby.

And the challenge that God puts before us in the baby is this: Do something with it - - do something worthwhile. And if there's any spark of decency in any human being, the only thing that he'll ever do toward a baby is something that's worthwhile....unless a man happens to be a beast, an absolutely insensitive human being - - he's not about to hurt a baby. He's about to help a baby.

So God's challenge to us in this brand new idea is always to do something worthwhile.

I caught it rather casually, that element in a late movie on television the other night. I was caught up by the two principal characters, a man and a woman. The woman was the kind of person who had allowed herself to become involved in a sordid relationship with a very evil man.....yet one day the kind of so-called "prince charming" comes her way, and he discovers in this woman, the mistress of the other man, the very evil person - - some element of decency.....and as he probes her mind and her heart, deliberately trying to find out how this element of decency could lie within this woman who has this miserable relationship with an evil man.....whence this single ray of decency? - - or at least the promise of it? And she gives his to understand that one day she had met another man, who asked her to do something worthwhile, and her reply is, "He was the only man who ever asked me to do anything worthwhile."

God is forever asking us to do something worthwhile. This is the supreme challenge which is the nature and the character of God, to do something worthwhile, of lasting significance and value. So God puts in front of us a baby, and you and I are always inclined to do something worthwhile toward a baby, so we begin by loving it.

Now magnify that truth against the background of the whole world - - God's challenge to us through Christ is to love the world. And the challenge is to believe that this is possible. But you and I have our prejudices, we have our selfish desires. There are times when the last thing in the world we're ever going to give to anybody else is a element of love....it costs too much, it's too risky. But God who is the challenger-come-to-us-in-Christ says, "Believe me - - try loving."

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When you look upon a child, what is a child but the personification of Dependence? For a certain period in his life there are certain things that he can never do for himself. God says, Let this be a challenge to you, that there are people in this world who remain in need. Believe me, says God, venture into faith, and spend your energy meeting the needs of other people.

This is the lamentable thing about some of us in our close relationship to other people - - we are so pre-occupied that we become blind to the fact that they are in need. A child needs to be directed -- challenged to do good -- so God challenges us to look upon other people, to challenge them to become good, and to walk in the right path. Oh, it takes a bit of doing to believe, but God knows what He's talking about. Maybe this is the basic sin of all of us, we're never quite sure that we want to believe that God knows what He's talking about. So the Church calls us again and again to Advent - - to begin all over again, to be confronted by God's brand-new-idea-in-Christ - - - to try it - - to test it - - to live by it.....

Until the end of time it will remain God's brand new idea, for the simple reason that a lot of folks have never gotten that far along in their experience, to know that God always has this new idea in mind. We're still limping along with the old way, of hatred, and envy, and doubt, and jealousy. And all the while God keeps coming back to us and saying, "I've got a new idea - - "

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded. It is not quite complete because of technical difficulties)

R.A.

Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Second Sunday in Advent December 8, 1968

"ADVENT: THE GOD REJECTERS"
(Matthew 2:3)

This afternoon at 2:00 or 3:00 o'clock, I didn't note the hour that precisely - - in the Stutzman Funeral Home on Jamaica Avenue in Queens Village of New York, there will be a service conducted for a 76-year old man. Now immediately you might say to yourself, and what's so unusual about that? Don't people die every day? - - and surely it's not extraordinary in this day for a man to reach the age of 76.

Nonetheless, I begin this sermon in this way because there is something a bit unusual about this service to be conducted this afternoon. According to the NEW YORK TIMES obituary item (for they did give two columns to it, by the way, and a photograph at that) - - this 76-year old man for a number of years considered himself King of the World. As reported in the obituary item, he conducted self-coronation rites in every state of the nation.....

...he visited some 67 college campuses, and there crowned himself King...

...he numbered among the capitals of the nations that he had visited 101 where he conducted this coronation rite....

...he had a throne - - a portable throne, if you please, a six-dollar aluminum folding chair....

...he had a sign painter gilt a crown for him which he proudly wore...

...he had an inflatable plastic globe that he took with him, symbolic of the world over which he had domain...

...he had a flag about a foot long, and on it emblazoned the sceptre of righteousness, the star of hope, the crown of victory.

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You find it amusing, don't you? Well undoubtedly no matter where he went and conducted these self-coronation rites, the people found it amusing, too, and it gave him a measure of encouragement....so much so that he made bold one day to go to Russia, and there in Moscow's Red Square he had an audience who looked at him, observed how he crowned himself King of all Nations. You call it a fanciful notion - - of course you do! Yet as I come now to stand before you to preach this sermon, using these as prefatory remarks, I tell you rather strenuously that this man, in all his fancy, serves as a symbol for the human race. For what he has done in fact most of us do in fancy.

For who among us has not crowned himself King of his own domain? Who among us, whether visible or invisible, does not hold in his hand some kind of a scepter by which he presumes to keep all things in order? Who among us does not live in some kind of an apparent, to us, impregnable fortress? It's part of the folly of man that he believes himself to have kingly qualities, and to endeavor to establish his reign and to bring other people into subjection.

Today, on the Second Sunday in Advent, this is reminiscent of another king, a king in fact, who had heard that there was another king coming into the world. From our Sunday School days we fefer to him as 'wicked King Herod.' You can read about him in the second chapter of Matthew....

> ...the report had come to him that another king was to be born, and that this king was to be born to rule over the Jews. Herod, scratching that royal head of his, quickly figured out: Why, there can't be two kings for one kingdom! I am already King! .....so immediately he recognized the threat in the pronouncement that there was somebody else born to be king.....

Sometimes we can say good things about bad men. Here's something good to be

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said about this bad man: he recognized at once the threat that Jesus Christ most certainly was going to prove to him. And the second good thing that has to be said about him: he made up his mind that he'd have to do something about it.

Note it very well from the very beginning that there's never anything that's devious about God. His intentions are always being made known, His purposes are always being proclaimed, He doesn't deal in anything under the table, He's forever above board. If He remains hidden to us, don't blame Him, blame our pollution and our covering-up of everything that exists between God and us. So He made it perfectly plain from the very beginning that Jesus Christ was born to be king. And therein lies a threat to man, who is by nature self-centered, who is by nature self-determined, who is by nature desirous of becoming independent. There's a peculiar streak in human nature, characterizing all of us, which defies the menace which the divine invasion always proves itself to be.

There cannot be two kings for one kingdom. Herod brings it out perfectly plain: "I will have to get rid of him." Herod represents those who are God-rejecters. God has had this kind of trouble with us from the very beginning, and if you allow me to say it ever so reverently, it's the great risk that God took, because God is forever the risk-taker. Whenever you get involved with any single human being you have a gamble on your hands. God-the-divine-gambler, took a risk with the whole human race, because having made us, He made us with freedom of will. He never intended that any one of us should automatically say Yes to Him. There's no divine thumb pressing a divine button that makes you and me say, "Yes, God." - - "Yes, God."

He gave us at the very beginning freedom of the will, which means, then,

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that man soon discovered that he could become a willful creature. Now the problem is that God is willful, too. God wills that all men should be saved. Every now and then man decides that he doesn't want to be saved. Every now and then man decides that he wants to go to Hell. And because God never looks upon us with a detachment, there is bound to be confrontation, there is bound to be this encounter. God out of love says there ought to be a king - - God in His wisdom says, "I must be their King."

...stained by original sin, we want to be king. This is the problem.

HIstorically now, King Herod of the Jews officially rejected Jesus Christ, a daring example of God-rejection. The same element historically remains today. There are nations on the face of this earth that officially reject God. You may remember what I told you on occasion about the president of our seminary in Philadelphia, Dr. Hoh, who a number of years ago got a letter in a mailing tube from a friend of his who was traveling in Eastern Europe. He sent him a poster, the like of which was seen on many walls in many villages in Eastern Europe. When Dr. Hoh unwrapped his tube and looked at the poster he found there this terrific figure of a man, significant of vitality and masculinity, of strength, of purpose - - headed toward a refuse heap, pushing a wheelbarrow. You remember now....there in the wheelbarrow is the frail, emaciated, dying form of a man, and on the body of the man had been scrawled crudely the words: JESU CHRISTUS.....this is within your lifetime and mine, where officially there are those who are getting rid of Jesus Christ.

With whatever sand remains in my shoes, I should like some day to visit Russia - - for a number of reasons. One is that I want to visit and see with my own eyes what I am told is there in Moscow - - an Anti-God Museum. It once

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had been a church, and now in that museum they have on display - -

...a Bible.....a baptismal cup....a crucifix....a chalice.....

...and boldly they proclaim that these are relics of a by-gone age. The new world has been established, and it's a godless world. Officially Jesus Christ has been rejected.

I'm not so sure that I read your mind precisely at this point, but it could be that you're rather comfortable and maybe a bit complacent at this point, because you say: but that's over there, it's not here.....and you can't possibly believe that you could ever be part of a group of people who could officially reject the fact of God. Yet I say to you as I stand in front of you, every one of us has a way of fortifying himself against God's invasion. Every one of us has a way of putting himself in his own little palace, a palace called Pride, in which we're quite proud of our own achievments, in which we're quite pleased with our own endeavors.....which I suggest to you is the curse of this affluent society of ours - - with all of our sophistication: we're doing very nicely -- who needs God? It's a curse that's far more real than many of you may care to admit. So we're quite proud with what we've done, with what we've accomplished - - we dwell in our palace called Pride.

God comes along and pierces, not the palace called Pride, because in His eyes it's a bubble.....God has a way of ordering life itself so that life has a way of bringing us to our knees and making us humble. But who doesn't spend a great deal of his time and his energy building block upon block -- his own palace called pride? Many of us seem to dwell, oddly enough, rather securely, in our fortress called Fear - - fear of the world out there - - fear of

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everything that God says we ought to try.....so we build our own little fortress, block upon block, which we believe is the kind of thing that can keep God from invading us, as we withdraw from the world.

Every one of us builds his own moat, in which he believes he can insulate himself against every attempt on the part of God to break down our barriers of self-determination. Each of us has his own way of trying to order life so that he speaks to the people he wants to speak to, he lives withthe kind of people he wants to live with - - he thinks in the way he wants to think. And then Jesus Christ comes along. And Jesus Christ says, "There are other kinds of people, and they're My people too."....and Jesus Christ comes along and He says, "There are other thoughts far nobler than yours." But you and I want to determine our own course, when all the while Jesus Christ says, "Ah, no you don't! If there's to be any meaning at all in life, it's to be found in the fact that I am the Way, I am the Truth - - I am Life."

I've never followed Billy Graham too closely, I suppose because I never quite had the time to listen to some of his broadcasts, and surely not able to journey a distance to where he might be holding forth. But I do recognize what I heard by way of transcription a short while ago, how when he appeared before a gathering at one of the universities in southern California

> ...it was a tremendous challenge to the youth of this nation. His theme was that everybody wants to <u>experience</u> something...
>
> - - so a kid goes off and tries pot just because he wants to experience it...
>
> - - he tries alcohol just because he wants to experience it....
>
> - - he's pestered until he tries sex, just because they say you ought to have the experience.....

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...and then, bless his soul, Billy Graham says, if this is what youth wants, is experience, then I challenge you to experience Jesus Christ! Try Him, as an "experience."

So God is always coming to us, and if he can't get a foot in the door of our hearts in any other way, He says, "Well at least try it! - - experiment with my way!" Beloved, make no mistake about it, the confrontation eventually sets in. Who is to be king? There's only one of two answers to be given, you either accept, or you reject. Even to put off accepting is a measure of rejection, and a risk that I wouldn't encourage any to take.

Anyone who has been preaching as long as I have has to sit down very soberly sometimes and assess his own preaching. How you may assess it, I don't know, but I can tell you full well that I would hope that every time that I come to this sacred desk I would introduce you to a decision-making process, so that every sermon, no matter what its theme, may be, may have as its net result an encouragement on your part to allow Jesus Christ to be King.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Third Sunday in Advent December 15, 1968

"ADVENT: THE GOD EVADERS"
(Luke 2:7)

Some men are remembered for the questions that they ask. Others are remembered because of the answers that they give. Some books you will read because you will discover as you read the book, page after page, that some new question is being asked. Some books you will reach for because, having read the book, you discovered in the pages of that book the answers to questions that had plagued you throughout the days of your years.

Now, now, do you catalog the Bible? The Bible, in the judgment of some of us, would be classified as the book of both questions and answers, for surely in the Bible we find the answer to the riddle which is life itself, the perfect answer which has come to us in Jesus Christ. For in Him and in Him alone is life, for did He not say, "I am come that you might have life and that you might have it abundantly."

In this book, the Bible, there are questions being asked. Some of them come quickly to mind. If you know your Bible you'll recognize some of life's most significant questions have been raised within the Bible itself:

..."Where are you, Adam?"

..."Am I my brother's keeper?"

..."What is truth?"

..."Where is he that is born king of the Jews?"

..."Will you at this time restore again to Israel the king?"

..."How can a man be born again?"

..."Are you he who should come, or should we look for another?"

The Bible - - it's a book of questions. Significantly enough, there are other

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questions also raised in the Bible that you have not always noted. These are numbered among the outstanding ones.

But now I suggest in this sermon that you think in terms of questions that are also there, such as this one - - you'll find it way back there in the 13th chapter of the Book of Judges. Now the Book of Judges for a good many people, even Bible readers, is quite undiscovered country. It's worth exploring. And when you come to that 13th chapter in the Book of Judges, you encounter the fact that God had seen fit to do something a little bit out of the ordinary as far as His Chosen People were concerned. You know, there are periods in history when He has to do something a little bit out of the ordinary ....He's always at work, but now, because of the pressures brought upon His Chosen People, and because of the yoke of the opressor, because He wanted the Philistines taken off of the back of His people, He said - -

"I'm going to send you a very special person - -
there's going to be a deliverer come."

Now He made this news known to the man who was going to be the <u>father</u> of this special person. Back there, even centuries before Jesus Christ, a man named Manoah reacted to this tremendous truth by simply asking a question, realizing full well that this was no ordinary thing that was going to happen, he reacts by saying, "What, now, shall we do with this child that's going to be born to us?".....a very important question, for not only that child but any child is not to be ignored - - the question of questions must be raised: What shall we do with this child?

In the conferences that I am pleased to conduct with those coming to me wanting to be married in this place, I've developed a series of questions. You

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see, the Church allows me to marry anyone as a Pastor of the Lutheran Church in America, provided I can honestly believe that God's blessing will rest upon this union, roughly speaking, that the material is here out of which a good home can be established. So I ask a number of questions.

I don't know where it appears on the list, but it's most certainly there - - I come to this question: How do you feel about children?

...this comes as quite a surprise to some people, that I should even raise the question, and rarely there is a chap who shies away from it and almost gives me to understand that that's none of the preacher's business. But it is the preacher's business because it's the church's business - - because the Church is proclaiming God's truth, and when God instituted marriage He had the home and the family in mind. So even before a couple exchange their promise to each other and have their union established, the question has to be raised there: How do you feel about children? .....because maybe in the final analysis there isn't anything quite as tragic as an unwanted child, for the simple reason that any child that's unwanted is going to be unloved. Nothing worse than that can ever happen to a human being - - not to be loved.

So the question remains: What will you do with this child?

Every time a child is born the question ought to be asked. And every day that you have relationship with a child the question should be answered, positively, significantly. This is one reason why you've discovered by this time -- it's almost become traditional now, it's not in the book....but it's an interpolation=of-sorts that I've put there.....that having baptized the child, I return the child to the mother's arms, and you ought to recognize these words by this time - - "God smiles upon us in many ways, perhaps never quite as much as when He places into our life and into our love the soul of a child, and as

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long as we live we have no greater responsibility."

God awakens in us this responsibility early, as we meditate upon the fact that He came to us in the form of a child. Whether you recognize it or not, during these four Sundays of Advent, each sermon in its own way is an attempt to deal with this question and an answer - - What shall we do with this child?"

A number of different answers of course. For our purpose today, the answer of the inn-keeper....which was an answer of indifference, because you remember the Scripture - -

> "And she brought forth her first-born
> child and laid him in a manger,
> because there was no room in the inn."

Surely it was evident to the inn-keeper that here was a woman with child, close to giving birth to her baby, but he treated the whole matter with complete indifference.....he didn't see fit to make any room for her.

Why? Why do people treat matters of utmost significance with indifference? I'm not so sure that people get up in the morning and say to themselves, Now I think I'll try to create as much hell today as I can - - I'll try to be as miserable today as any human being can be.....

...oh, there may be people like that. Fortunately for me, I can honestly say that I don't think I've ever met one as evil as that. But I have met people who have become instruments of evil, who quite unwittingly, I say with the utmost of charity - - have allowed themselves to become the tools of the devil, engender a great deal of ill-will and suspicion between people, sow seeds of dissension, raise doubts where doubts ought not to exist.....refuse to be charitable. You've met people like that even as I've met people like that. But with the utmost of charity, I don't

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believe that they really intend to be that way. After all, this is the time of the year when a person can afford to be generous, in his thoughts of people. So being as charitable as possible with the inn-keeper, who treated this woman with child with complete indifference, it wasn't that he deliberately intended it to be that way.....but it was! Why?

The answer could lie in the fact that he was pre-occupied with other things. After all, a man must make a living.....after all, this was the big season, the peak season of the year....after all, this was when he made his greatest return by which he could operate all the other times of the year. If he didn't make it at census-time, he wouldn't make enough to support his business in the slack season. So you see, he's pre-occupied with other things.

It could be a question, you see, of stacking up in front of us priorities, and every time you give your attention to something as over against something else, you do establish a priority, and you do become occupied with the thing that does claim your time and your attention. A child, about to be born? - - - - he treated the fact with indifference.

When I talk with grandparents I learn sometimes that they rue the day when, as parents, they've allowed other things to become so important in their lives that they forgot what claimed a rightful priority. I've been with you long enough now that I can trust myself in your presence.....by my own admission, among the things for which I ask God to forgive me are those days when I had trouble with my priorities, even days when I should not have gone to a church meeting and should have gone off to the bleachers with a tiny, brown-eyed, dark-haired boy. There are certain things to be done at a certain period in life that just can't be done at any other time. The inn-keeper had one chance. He didn't know how to deal with priorities.

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I suppose this is one reason why people can be indifferent to Jesus Christ, because they are pre-occupied.

I suppose there's another reason.....now let's bring it down to our day. I read the other day the writing of a man who is very perceptive. He's convinced that never in the history of Western man has there been an age quite like this, and his appraisal lies in the fact that he said this is the first time in the history of Western man when we've raised up a generation that refuses to take God seriously, to be indifferent toward God. And the folly of man's unredeemed nature is never more pronounced than in his refusal to take God seriously. Alas for us, an increasing number of people in our day look upon God's-break-through-in-Christ as neither a miracle nor a menace. Modern man's sin-of-sins may well be his indifference, because God-who-does-not-ignore will not allow Himself to be ignored! For ultimately the fact of God remains, and eventually in one way or another a man has to reckon with God. And in the meantime, how much harm he does himself and other people by his refusal to take God-in-Christ seriously.

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Now I suggest a reason why this may be true - - it could be that those who have yet to take Him seriously have never found anything in you and me that warrants their taking Him seriously. Mahatma Gandhi is supposed to have said to a man who tried to make a Christian out of him, "What can your Christ do for me that he hasn't done for you?" I wish you could have met her - - she refers to herself as 'Pippy' -- Pippy Orth. Helen Orth is her proper name. She's a "born-again Christian." The experience came to her on a college campus, and now that she's been graduated she's giving herself to going around on college campuses, establishing residences and just talking to people about Jesus Christ. You pay more than ordinary attention to her when she talks, not just because of what she says but because of what she radiates. You can't possibly be indifferent to somebody who is radiant.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Fourth Sunday in Advent December 22, 1968

"ADVENT: THE GOD SEEKERS"
(Luke 2:25)

I frankly confess to you, I'm never quite certain how I ought to react to a baby. I, now, who for three decades have been reaching for them, taking them, holding them in the crook of my arm and naming them for Jesus Christ, continue to have mixed reaction toward the sight and the sound and the squirming of a baby. For am I not reminded that out of the Far East there comes the observation that, taking a realistic reading of life, one ought to look upon a baby, the birth of a child, and cry; and when one comes to death, one ought to rejoice and be made glad. For who among us has not lived long enough to know that life is strain, and strife, and stress? It is always tension, always a series of unsettlements, and when in the province that God gives me as your Pastor I walk with you into the shadow of death, and stand there at the edge of the grave, do you not find a measure of comfort in hearing me echo the old words - - "May light perpetual shine upon him, and may his soul through the mercy of God forever be in peace."......who doesn't react favorably to the inscription that's found upon the tombstone of Martin Luther King, Jr., not far from Atlanta, Georgia - - "Thank God I'm free -- free at last"?

...soberly we react to life and say, it's that kind of thing - - tension... ...strife....misery. And death comes as a blessed release! So I say to you, I have mixed reactions when I look upon a child, never quite certain how I ought to react, and the years have taught me to be sobered by the words that come from the ancient East -- One weeps at the birth of a child; one rejoices at the coming of death.

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We come today to the last sermon in the series of the Advent-tide that deals with the general theme: What shall we do with this child? Each of these Sundays in turn during Advent we have been given the response that others have given to the birth of Jesus Christ. Now today, on this Sunday nearest Christmas, the question is raised again: What shall we do with this child? - - - What shall we make of this child? And we turn to an old man and his reaction, the old man Simeon, found in the temple when Jesus Christ was being presented according to custom.

I tell you with all the ardor of my soul, pay attention to what old men have to say. Give more than ordinary heed to the way old men react, what with all this pushing around of a younger generation, when old people sometimes are being short-changed. What in the wisdom of God is age for if it isn't for the mastering of certain lessons that come only as one generation learns from another generation? And if God allows any of you a generous portion of time, it might be that you might benefit from the schooling to which He continues to allow you to be exposed. There are some things to be learned only at the feet of old men.

There was the old man Simeon - - he has a majestic reaction when Jesus Christ, a baby, is presented, for when he looks upon a child he sees the man, he doesn't simply see a baby. Fortunate indeed is any man who looks upon a child and sees the projection through the years, for babies were meant to grow, babies were meant to mature, and to develop, to become men. So this wise old man who had been seeking for Jesus Christ, once he beholds the face of a baby, doesn't simply see only the face of a child, but sees the man that the child becomes.

I pause for the moment to share with you the reflection that here was an old man, waiting in the temple, whose heart's desire was that he should not die

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until he had experienced the most wonderful thing that God could ever allow any man to know. My friend, I ask the question: for what do you live? What do you want most ere you breathe your last? The answers come quickly, and what a variety. For this old man had learned the lesson well - - there is no meaning in life aside from the indelible imprint of God written largely. And God-come-to-us-in-Jesus Christ was the supreme revelation....so much so that this old man ends by saying: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared before the face of all people." Beyond Jesus Christ there isn't anything more. He beheld Jesus Christ in a baby's face.....the wisdom of age.

In "The Shoes of the Fisherman," in one of the early scenes, the political prisoner is released after having spent two decades in Siberia. There is the confrontation for the first time in the twenty years between, now, the accuser and the accused. The accuser had never had done with the high regard for the prisoner. He had a tremendous respect for his integrity. And as the two are alone now in their first meeting, the man with great authority who had done the accusing, says to the accused: "What now have you learned in these twenty years?" ....and immediately that man says that where there is no love it's like a vine - - it withers, without life.

It's one thing to ask a man what he has seen in the past twenty years, and to be able to read largely the hand of God in the past. It's another thing to be able to look ahead and to be able to see the hand of God writing largely in the future, to be able to understand the projection. This is what this old man Simeon did when he beheld the face of Jesus Christ - - he simply did not see a baby, he saw a baby become man.

On this Sunday nearest Christmas I charge you to remember, because it's

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very easy to become sentimental about a baby, it's very easy to become sentimental about Christmas. When we react sentimentally we almost say meaningless things - - the sentimental reaction to a baby that we give so often: "Isn't he cute!" ....that isn't saying very much. There are people who come to Christmas and sentimentally react to Jesus Christ as a baby. But I've come now to remind you that you look upon a baby who became a man. You can never imprison anyone in his childhood. This is the risk that wo many of us take. It's the great problem that confronts many a parent - - he never quite releases a child - - he forever looks upon flesh-of-his-flesh and blood-of-his-blood and treats him as the child he no longer is. The old man Simeon looked upon a baby and immediately thought in terms of the man he would become.

Stephen Vincent Benet and his sister once wrote a poem, a highly imaginative thing that deals with Nancy Hanks in heaven. Now Nancy Hanks was the mother of Abraham Lincoln....she died not long after Abraham Lincoln was born, which means she never knew him, as to what happened in his childhood and what happened beyond childhood. And Benet has Nancy Hanks coming up eagerly to each new person who enters heaven, and of course she expresses her concern about her baby...."Tell me," she says, "Did he grow up? Did he live to visit the great big town? Did he become strong?".....in this world she never knew that her baby grew up. It can be said that here is a parable. There are some people who never knew that Jesus Christ grew up. They know Him only as the Babe, the Babe in Bethlehem. It's <u>easier</u> that way - - you can handle a baby - - you can manipulate a baby. You can't always handle a man. A man can make a moral demand upon you. God, not the baby but the man, requires a moral response.

When God saw fit to come to this earth there were those who were always

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looking for Him. God responds to those who seek. He makes Himself readily available. But I submit to you that when you go looking for God you ought to prepare yourself for what you might find. This sermon is entitled, "The God Seekers," and I challenge you that when you go looking for God, be prepared to find Him in all His fulness. There were some people who saw, good-naturedly, only a baby, and they stop at that point - - they imprison Jesus Christ in the Babe of Bethlehem.

This is part of our weakness, we're always imprisoning people....

...some people imprison Jesus Christ in stained glass windows...

...some people imprison Jesus Christ in carved wooden figures in an altar....

...some people imprison Jesus Christ in a certain <u>place</u> - - here's where they keep Him...here's where they come to find Him... ...this is the only place they ever know Him.

...there are some people who imprison Jesus Christ in a certain <u>day</u> - - Christmas - - and their souls are flooded with charity and good will, but it's confined, imprisoned, only to one day....

The blessing of the old man Simeon was that his experience of Jesus Christ wasn't going to be the imprisoning thing of a tiny child, for he knew full well that the child would grow up to become a man, and he talked about the demands that this man would have upon people. For God-become-man would speak to people as a man, and the last thing in the world that some of us want to have happen to us is to have somebody speak to us as a man -- to lay-it-on-the-line, to bring things into sharp and clear and proper focus. He wouldn't take it away from anybody, but when he's done his sinning, then he wants to come and

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have the word "Forgiven" spoken to him, and that's the way some of us want it.

Some of us enjoy our sinning very much - - we become very secure in what we think about people when we sell them short. Some of us never have done with other people's past, and we become terribly secure by imprisoning people in their past, and build a little fortress around ourselves.

Some of us become very secure according to our prejudices, and then every now and then, nobly intentioned, we come to God and say, "Forgive us." But when God speaks to us as a man, He not only says "I forgive you," but as a man He lays it on the line and says, "I forgive you, but go now, and sin no more." If that isn't talking like a man, I don't know what is. And God sublimely uses that kind of language, and that's not baby-talk - - - that's God talking like a man, treating us like the men He wants us to become:

"Go, sin no more."

So the ancient Simeon who went seeking for Jesus Christ found Him in the Babe-become-Man and committed himself to Him.

The great and wonderful thing is -- fairly amazing, surely comforting, that God seems to allow at least one somewhere who can stand up without any hesitation, without any reservation, with perfect affirmation and reverence declare the name GOD.....to be able to find Him perfectly and completely as he looks down the avenue of life and sees stress and strain and shadow, even to see a cross. It's easy to look for God and to find Him in the Babe.....it's easy to look for God and to find Him in all that's beautiful and tranquil. But to look for God and to find Him in tension, in unsettlement, even in a cross! Yet if you're looking for God, you'll never completely find Him until you find Him that way. Maybe this is one reason why I go on praying for a few more years...it must be exceedingly wonderful to master the lesson of life by God's help to that degree, that come wind or weather, you can say GOD.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon-Pastor Shaheen
Christmas Eve

December 24, 1968

"HOW FAR TO BETHLEHEM?"

The text is the 15th verse of the 2nd chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

> "And the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing."

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In one single newscast today, lasting but a minute or so, there was, as you might expect, reference made to Apollo 8....remarks such as this one:

" - one of the greatest single events in the history of the human race - "

...and that comment made by none other than an outstanding Britisher who constantly has criticized our space efforts....

...a remark such as this: " - proceeding with incredible precision - "

...a remark such as this: " - everything going according to the book - "

It is a truth, of course, that we've never had a Christmas quite like this one, and I frankly confess that as one with little scientific orientation, when I first learned that man's great spectacular was being scheduled for this, our holy day, I reacted with no small measure of resentment - - is this the vanity of man, that now, on Christmas, he would have us look toward the heavens, not to scan the heights to discover the Star of Bethlehem, but to look at man's star of his own devising? - - is this the vanity of man, that on this Christmas Day our thoughts should be turned to voices from the heavens, not as a voice from God, with an angelic chorus, but a trio of voices, sent from earth to heaven, and there once they had conquered the heavens, they would speak to us?

Man is very clever - - absolutely amazing what he's done in such little time.

Would there be, on this Christmas Day, any occasion to sing "Glory to God in the highest"? - - when it's NASA that comes in for acclamation. Would man be so vain as to choose this time for his spectacular, when for centuries Christmas has been reserved to call man's attention to God's spectacular? Ah, make no mistake about it, my friends, there'll never be another Christmas like this one. For this is the Christmas of the great journey - - man has never traveled so far, nor so fast.

But I've had second thoughts....what a logical time for man to make his trek to the moon, for Christmas, if it's anything, has always been the time for a journey. Who among you has not made a journey this Christmas-time...

...I saw some of you, who have come down from New Haven

...I saw some of you - - who have come from Rutgers, New Jersey

...I saw some of you - - who have come from Minneapolis

...I saw some of you - - who have come from St. Louis....

...Christmas is a time for the journey. And if we happen to be stay-at-home, who doesn't always think of a road at Christmas-time? - - the road that takes him back home, the days of his childhood, when as a child he first was introduced to the meaning that Christmas is a miracle, and the awe and the wonder that characterized the Christmas of our childhood.

Christmas is always a time for taking to the road, in one way or another. For so it was at the very beginning - - Christmas was God's great journey to earth. You can't divorce Christmas from a journey...

....wise men took to the road

.....shepherds said one to another "Let's go" - and so they came

.....Mary and Joseph -- they had their marching orders, for they went from where they were to Bethlehem

...you'll always associate a journey with Christmas.

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So tonight it's the great journey, and well it should be. How far is it to the moon? - - 250,000 miles? How far is it to the moon? - - two days' travel in a space ship, if you please.

...how far is it to Bethlehem? You can go to Dulles tonight, and in less time than it took Mary and Joseph to take the journey from Nazareth you can be in Bethlehem. How far is it to Bethlehem-town? How far is it to the Moon? We have only to walk into the living room at the Parsonage at 919 Highland Drive, we turn a switch, and we're on our way to the moon. We can follow the course - incredible - - amazing.....

.....How far to Bethlehem?

"It isn't far to Bethlehem-town;
It's anywhere the Christ comes down,
And finds in people's friendly face
A welcome and an abiding-place.
The road to Bethlehem runs right through
The home of folks like me and you."

Now, how far is it to Bethlehem? Ah, my friend, farther than you think. For the road to Bethlehem is as far as repentence. For no man can take the road that leads to Bethlehem and arrive eventually unless he travels as a penitent, for at journey's end there is a Saviour waiting to greet us, and the only way to greet a Saviour is on your knees. We are the unworthy ones. God is always blessing us, God is always waiting to bless us, and the greatest of all blessings comes to us at the end of a journey that leads to Bethlehem. But it's as far away as repentence!

...how far is the moon? It could be for us as far away as repentence, for we of all the people on the face of the earth -- why should we be the ones to get there as we

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we have? Is it that God has looked down upon us with any special favor? Yet one must be very careful lest he go to bed tonight and by week's end, if our prayers should be answered for a safe return, lest any of us should say by our mind, and by our power, and by man's ingenuity this has been done.....

How far is it to Bethlehem? It's as far away as humility. For when one arrives at Bethlehem he's greeted by God himself, King of kings and Lord of lords, and only the humble can receive Him. Whenever you travel to Bethlehem, even today, you visit the Church of the Holy Nativity - - you never walk straight in, you always must bow the head and lower yourself...for significantly enough, even the doorway has been lowered, reminding us that only the humble can approach the Manger Throne. Blessed be Mary, chosen by God - -

> "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my saviour, For he hast beheld the low estate of his handmaiden - - "

...how far away is Bethlehem? It's as far away as humility.

How far away is Bethlehem? It's as far away as faith. For journey's end comes only to those who honestly believe that at the end of a wandering star is God to be found. The road to Bethlehem is the believer's trail. In this day and age we believe, but not always in God. We believe in our own resources, we believe in our own ingenuity, we believe in our own strength....and we end up perhaps being the most neurotic of any generation America has ever produced. We have faith in the wrong things, we have faith in the wrong ends, we have faith in the wrong purposes. The road to Bethlehem is marked "Believer's Trail - - Continue On."

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So I greet you on this Christmas Eve, the night of the Great Journey. We who are ushered in now into an entirely new and different era - - I stand in awe, I am frightened, I can't possibly think of what is in store for us as the future unfolds.....absolutely tremendous....a new age. Yet I say to you, with all the ardor of my soul, whatever glory lies ahead in the new age into which we are now being ushered in this, the Great Journey of man, it can't possibly compare with the Great Journey that God made from Heaven to earth.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The First Sunday After Christmas December 29, 1968

"TO FOCUS ARIGHT"

If it's a text that you'll be wanting, let me call your attention to the 34th verse of the 6th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew; it's part of the Sermon on the Mount:

> " And Jesus said, Take no thought for the morrow;
> Sufficient unto the day is its evil."

Now let me begin with an understatement: At year's end we are a people confused and bewildered. So much has happened in the past year, and so fast. It's not only the variety and the rapidity of events that compounds the evil, but it's also the pressure as well, and if anyone is given to any kind of reflection, seriously contemplating the fact that another chapter in time is drawing to a close, with all the ardor of my soul I invite you now, on this the Sunday nearest the end of the year, on this the Sunday nearest the beginning of a new year, to ponder with me the meaning of it all - - this bewilderment, this confusion, that characterizes our day, perhaps more so than any other time that we've ever experienced.

What shall we make of it? - or the question perhaps, Where shall we look? And maybe in the final analysis the question-of-questions may not be so much, Where shall we look? as perchance "How shall we focus upon the thing that we happen to see?" We'll do our looking, all right. Whenever we're bewildered and confused we look this way and that way, which is also a mark of our confusion - - it isn't that we won't look. The problem may be, how can we properly focus upon the thing that we happen to see?

In our bewilderment and in our confusion there are people who look to the past, and they talk longingly of the "good old days." We've had a bit of

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nostalgia at the Parsonage ever since Christmas Eve. For there the conversation piece that was drawn from underneath that modest heap of gifts beneath the Christmas tree was one that had Winifred's name on it - - a Sears-Roebuck catalog of 1897. You know the story behind it, don't you? A very clever college professor who was trying to ascertain what life was like toward the end of the 19th century - - he thought perhaps the answer might come in reading certain articles that appeared in certain journals at that time. And then it dawned upon him -- maybe turning the page of a mail order catalog, you might catch something of the mood and the temper of the day....

...well that most certainly has happened with us, even though we don't go back all the way to 1897 - - there's enough in it for any man who's between 40 and 55 years of age to have his nostalgic moments. The past does seem so idyllic. Who doesn't appreciate the way it's said: "the good old days."

Yet I smile to myself when I read some of the pages of the catalog. It's almost like the huckster standing in front of you. On one page there's a sure cure for the smoke habit.....on another page there is some kind of a nostrum that will cure absolutely anything that ails you - (I don't quite remember whether this carries a money-back guarantee or not). But even reading realistically, as one turns the pages of a chapter out of the past, when he focuses clearly, he may discover that while they were the old days, perhaps they weren't quite as good as we thought they were. For even these promised remedies did not always bring results. And how well I remember as a lad, as part of the 20th century, anticipating the delivery of the Sears-Roebuck catalog when it came through the mail. We looked upon it as our "wishing-book." .....we too would thumb the pages, for all the things we wished we had. Some

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we got....and even now at this distance, safe as it may be, if one focuses properly upon the past it wasn't always as good as our wishing would have had it. So maybe the question-of-questions is not "Where shall we look?" but "How shall we focus upon what we've seen?" For not everyone can fully appreciate the meaning of history, and yesterday's chapter, for the simple reason that he's never focused upon it properly.

There are some people who when they look, turn their faces away from the past and lose themselves in the future. They are the future-scanners. They talk in terms of the day that's about to come. They dream, they plan, they talk only in terms of the future. There's a great deal to be said for this. But even when one looks toward the future, ought he not to master the fine art of focusing? For what is it that a man would look for in the unfolding of time? And when this hoped-for tomorrow does come, have we not lived long enough to experience, even in the unfolding of the future, a measure of disillusionment and disappointment, if only for the reason that when we scan the future we didn't learn properly to focus the lens upon what it was in the future that had to be discerned properly.

It's a surprising thing when you come to this text that commands attention at year's end, the words of our Blessed Lord Jesus who said, "Take no thought for the morrow; sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." What shall we make of this? Doesn't Jesus want us to think in terms of the future? After all, this is the age of the planner, isn't it? We who read history, are we not given to understand that Russia has done what she's done because she was clever enough to project herself into one five-year plan after another? Are there not people who curse their ancesters because they did not focus enough

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upon the future and look to the days that were yet to come? Do we not feel that we've been denied certain blessings because those who lived in the yester-year did not think in terms of our needs? What shall we do, then, with the words of the Lord Jesus Christ who says, "Take no thought for the morrow"? Isn't He inconsistent? - - because in practice He did think in terms of the morrow....

> ...hanging there upon the cross He looked down upon His bewildered mother, and He looked upon a confused disciple, and in His dying moments He gave Himself to thinking in terms of her future, and He made preparation for the years yet to come - - He did look ahead....
>
> ...and He allowed any present moment to have meaning only as it was related to what was yet to unfold....

Didn't the Advent season, so recently completed, those four Sundays before Christmas - - aren't they Sundays of the future look? Didn't we even symbolize for children the lighting of the Advent wreath, one candle after another, looking upon the lighting of one candle to the lighting of the next, until one day all four candles would have been lighted? In those Sundays before Christmas, aren't some of the Lessons that we read in the Scriptures dealing with preparation for the future in which Jesus Christ focuses our attention upon the things yet to come?

> ...yet Jesus stands up and says to a group of people, in that great sermon that He preached - - "Don't take any thought for the morrow -- it's enough to think of the problem at hand" (that's a free translation of that text: "Take no thought for the morrow; suf-

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ficient unto the day is the evil thereof.") In this whole matter of focusing, this is where we have to master some kind of an art - - looking not simply to the past, not simply looking to the future, but also being able to focus upon the present, in the light of both the past and the future.

Perhaps the thing that troubles most of us -- we've never learned how to live in the present moment, we've never learned how to look at the thing nearest at hand. And this is precisely, if I understand the mind of Jesus aright, what He's trying to say to us: give some thought, some serious thought, to the present moment. Learn to focus upon it properly -- see it in its present perspective. With all the ardor of my soul I invite you to think in these terms. I once read about a distinguished Britisher who was caught up in all this so-called "social involvement" long before it caught on here in the States. He gave himself and his parish to setting up centers that would help meet the needs of people directly, his parish became the center for the distribution of food and clothing....he turned an area nearby his church into a recreation center, simply to touch the lives of youngsters as best he could, in whatever way he could. He became terribly impatient with Communists in his section of town who laughed at him, and simply said, "You're doing a band-aid type of treatment - - don't waste your energies on this kind of thing - - allow things to get far worse, and then maybe the brand new day will come."

....as I read it, this is where a lot of people today have failed to master the fine art of focusing upon the present hour and the way to meet the needs of the present hour.

I wish he were here right now to hear what I'm going to say. You'd feel very uncomfortable if he were seated alongside of you. You might squirm a bit,

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and he might say, "I've had this from you before, Pastor." He's a 26-year old tramp. I had a relationship with him through my former parish. I knew him when he was nothing but a youngster. And even though that relationship was rather casual, every now and then in the past twenty years, when he finds himeslf in a tight spot, he starts reaching out and latching on to some of us. The number is getting smaller and smaller -- the attrition rate is quite great because after a while you get tired of it....but some of us are still there.

He came to see me. He's a chap who's running, running, running - - oh, he has all the fine words...."identity crisis" -- he kept playing that thing back and forth -- no one ever really understood him....nobody really "takes time to listen" to him. He has dreams of a better world, he's not at all pleased with what some of us have done with this world and the kind of world we've passed on to him. He can take us to task all right, and not without justification! In one of the moments that we spent together he said, "Tell me about my grandfather - - "....and here I had the golden opportunity to come in with all that I could offer. I said to him, 'Your grandfather was a plain, ordinary man, who did an honest day's work for an honest dollar. He was faithful to your grandmother, he was a plain, ordinary citizen, who knew a measure of delight in doing the thing that had to be done nearest at hand - - a lesson that you have not learned."

At 26 years of age he's never learned what it is to do the thing that needs to be done in the present moment, and to do it well. And after all, that's what makes this world go round! Dreaming is a luxury, and we don't live by luxuries. Not that I would remove from any man the poetic impulse and deny him his roman-

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ticism, but after all there is today. This is why, as I endeavor to understand the restlessness of youth, I would ask the wisdom of God in whatever relationship that I have with them to make plain that you don't cure the ills of the world by wishing it worse, but by rolling up your sleeves and taking care of the problem nearest at hand.

Some of you who know me well know how impatient I become when I have to attend committee meetings where hour after hour after hour is spent in drafting resolutions, making reports.....when all the while there's a neighbor next door, there's an old man within the family circle itself, there's a youngster growing up - - learning to focus upon the thing nearest at hand. If you ask me for some kind of a recommendation for facing a new year, I think I'd have to ask you to consider this very earnestly.

You remember that "Traveler's Notebook" that I wrote for you? - - a collection of impressions and observations from that trip west a few years ago. It has a final page. I mention my friend, Dr. Harold Eskew. Somebody gabe him a camera and a supply of film. He made a trip, he went on a journey, taking pictures wherever he went - - on a journey that he was never again to repeat -- a once-in-a-lifetime proposition. When he came back and had the film developed, much to his regret he had never focused the camera properly... ...every scene that he had taken was out of focus.

I can't think of anything worse that could ever happen to any of us than to come to journey's end and find that when we were there at a precise moment when something was happening - - and we never saw it in proper focus.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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January 7, 1968	"The Witness of Words"	Exodus 20:7
January 14, 1968	"One-Day-In-Seven"	Exodus 20:8
January 21, 1968	"As God's Assistants"	Exodus 20:12
January 28, 1968	"Halo-A-Day"	Exodus 20:13
February 4, 1968	"The High Cost of Low-Level Living"	Exodus 20:14
February 11, 1968	"On Deposit By God"	Exodus 20:15
February 18, 1968	"No Single Accommodation"	Exodus 20:16
February 25, 1968	"To Be Satisfied"	Exodus 20:17
	Key Words of Lent A Series	
March 3, 1968	"Temptation"	Matt. 4:1
March 10, 1968	"Faith"	Matt. 15:28
March 17, 1968	"Obedience"	Luke 11:28
March 24, 1968	"Compassion"	John 6:5
March 31, 1968	"Rejection"	John 8:59
April 7, 1968	"When The King Comes" Palm Sunday	
April 14, 1968	"While It Was Still Dark" Easter Day	John 20:1
April 28, 1968	"In His Steps"	I Peter 2:21
May 5, 1968	"As Servants of God"	I Peter 2:16
May 5, 1968	R.S. on "Pattern for Worship"	
May 12, 1968	"When Is A Home Christian?	Luke 2:51-52
May 12, 1968	R.S. on "In the Name Of..."	
May 19, 1968	"To Ask The Right Question"	Luke 18:36
May 19, 1968	R.S. on "Amen"	
May 26, 1968	"And You Also"	John 15:27

May 26, 1968	R.S. on "The Introit"	
June 2, 1968	". . From Heaven" Pentecost	Acts 2:2
June 2, 1968	The Confirmation Sermon	
June 9, 1968	"On Being Made Silent Before God"	Isaiah 6:1-8
June 10, 1968	Memorial Service Sermon for Dr. Franklin Clark Fry	
June 16, 1968	"Baccalaureate" Sermon	Luke 4:16-21
June 30, 1968	"Sinner's Friend"	Luke 15:1
July 7, 1968	". . On Judgment"	Luke 6:36-37
July 14, 1968	". . On Getting Along With One Another"	Romans 12:18
July 21, 1968	". . On The Now of Salvation"	Romans 6:3-11
August 11, 1968	". . Like An Old Man Running"	Luke 15:11-32
August 18, 1968	". . Christ and the City"	Luke 19:41-47a
August 25, 1968	". . On The Peril of Satisfction"	Luke 18:9-14
September 1, 1968	". . Like a Vineyard-Keeper"	Matt. 20:1-6
September 8, 1968	". . Like a Good Samaritan"	Luke 10:25-37
September 15, 1968	". . Like A Faith Healer"	Luke 17:11-19
September 22, 1968	". . Like A Good Provider"	Matt. 6:24-34
September 29, 1968	". . Like A Father's Face"	Matt. 18:10
October 6, 1968	Communion Meditation	Col. 3
October 13, 1968	". . Like a Rain-Giver"	Deut. 11:8-21
October 27, 1968	". . Concerning Stewardship"	
November 3, 1968	". . Like a Tear-Wiper"	Rev. 7:17
November 10, 1968	". . Like An Unforgiving Father"	Matt. 18:21-35

November 17, 1968	A Day of Humiliation and Prayer	
November 24, 1968	"Like a Bridegroom Coming"	Matt. 25:1-13
November 28, 1968	"Bless The Lord" Thanksgiving Day	Psalm 103
	The ADVENT Series	
December 1, 1968	"Advent: The Challenger"	Judges 13:8
December 8, 1968	"Advent: The God Rejecters"	Matt. 2:3
December 15, 1968	"Advent: The God Evaders"	Luke 2:7
December 22, 1968	"Advent: The God Seekers"	Luke 2:25
December 24, 1968	"How Far To Bethlehem?" Christmas Eve	Luke 2:15
December 29, 1968	"To Focus Aright"	Matt 6:34